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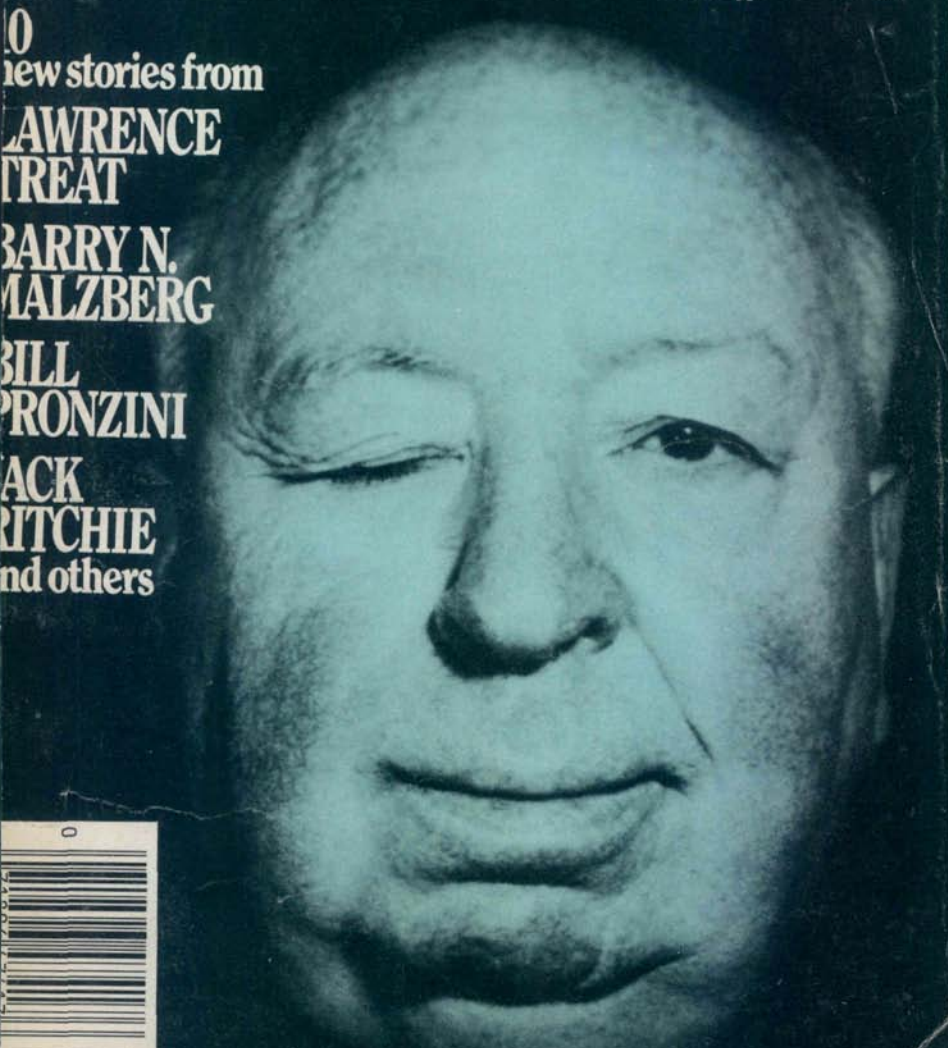
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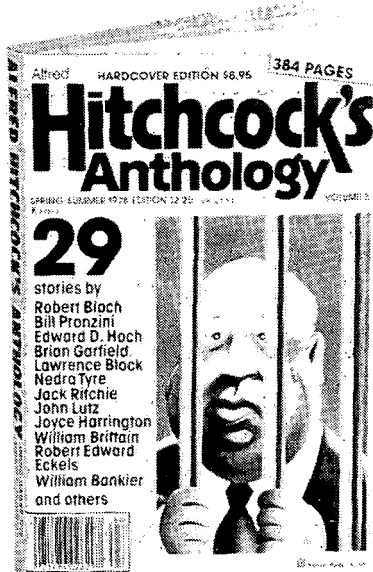


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VOLUME 23, NO. 4

APRIL 1978

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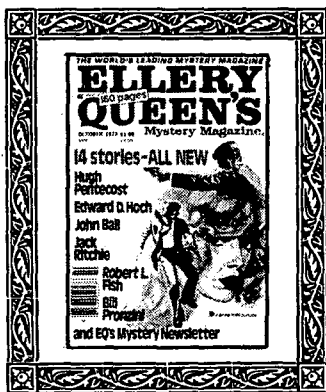
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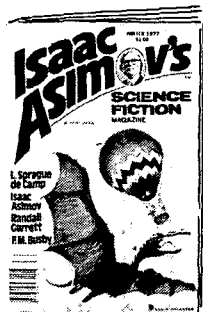
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April 1978

Dear Reader:

April is a month that inspires poetry and song, so I've decided to present an appropriate offering of birds, gardens, and patios—to get you in the mood for the summer ahead.

First, a timid husband builds himself a well-stocked invincible sanctuary at the foot of his garden where he can enjoy his privacy in Dorothy Simpson's tale of family affection. Jack Ritchie's old night-flyer, Cardula, solves a mystery in his own inimitable fashion when he meets an upper-class kleptomaniac.

Rounding things out, Kathryn Gottlieb has a tale about a young woman in the springtime of her life who wants desperately to be cared for.

Remember to keep warm—April showers can give you a bad chill—and good reading.

*Reyes Hitchcock*

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*Arthur took extraordinary measures to see that his sanctuary  
would never be violated . . .*

# THE SANCTUARY

by DOROTHY SIMPSON



**A**rthur loathed fish pie. Every Friday evening for twenty-five years he had been presented with varying versions of the glutinous mess which now confronted him and he swallowed to control his rising nausea as he picked up his fork and steeled himself to take the first mouthful.

"Mmm, delicious," said Hilda. She took another generous forkful and chewed with relish. Her pebble-grey eyes dared him to disagree.

Both of them knew that he would not, that it would be pointless for



him to do so. Once, years ago, he had summoned up the courage to indicate his distaste for this particular dish. Hilda had simply looked at him coldly and said, "I'm sorry to hear that, Arthur," and had continued to serve fish pie on Fridays as usual.

Nor had that been the end of the matter. For weeks afterwards Arthur's life had been even more uncomfortable than usual—Hilda's nagging had intensified, her denigration of him had become even more virulent, and he had had to suffer the indignity of going to work in dirty collars and socks with holes in them.

Hilda well knew how to strike where it hurt most. The only tattered remnants of Arthur's self-respect that remained to him related to the value placed upon him by Arkwright's. "My right-hand man," Mr. Arkwright called him, and Arthur knew he meant it. "You can give me all the bright young executive types you like, Arthur," he had said in a moment of unusual expansiveness after an office party, "but for a firm like Arkwright's, it's reliability that counts. When we say we'll deliver in six weeks we mean six weeks, not six months. And it's upon men like you that Arkwright's depends."

Even now Arthur still burned with humiliation at the memory of the day when Mr. Arkwright, tactfully averting his eyes from Arthur's grubby shirtcuffs, had gently asked, "Hilda all right, Arthur?" Up until then Arthur had not dared to rebel by washing his own shirts, darning his own socks, knowing that to do so would merely prolong the period of purgatory. That night he had gone home determined to fend for himself, only to find that Hilda, with diabolical intuition, had brought the punishment to an end and his gesture of defiance had been denied him.

He had never rebelled again. It simply wasn't worth it. Although he despised himself for his cowardice, there was in Hilda a rock-like strength that rendered him impotent—in every way.

Now he forked some of the slithery mess into his mouth, tried to swallow it without allowing it to touch his palate, and took a sip of water. He did not look at Hilda. He did not want to see the gleam of satisfaction in her eyes.

Suddenly he was swept by a violent desire to pick up his plate and empty the disgusting stuff all over the carefully regimented iron-grey waves of hair that marched across Hilda's head. Of their own volition his hands gripped the edges of the plate and he watched, fascinated, as



with a life of their own they actually began to lift it off the table. With a supreme effort of will he unclamped his fingers and clasped his hands in his lap to stop them shaking. Then he shot an apprehensive glance at Hilda, to see if she had noticed.

Mercifully, she hadn't. She was eating mechanically now, frowning at her plate. Clearly there was something on her mind. What would it be this time? Arthur sighed and picked up his fork again. Hilda could not live without a grievance of some kind to sustain her and if life did not provide her with one then she would conjure one up out of thin air.

She had noticed the sigh. "What's the matter?" she said sharply.

Arthur merely shook his head.

"Cat got your tongue?" She paused. "I didn't notice that you were exactly at a loss for words when you were chatting up our new neighbor this morning."

So that was it.

"We only introduced ourselves," Arthur said defensively.

Hilda snorted. "It doesn't take five minutes to introduce yourself. Well, does it?" she demanded to Arthur's silence.

"We said good morning," Arthur said carefully. "Then we introduced ourselves. I said what a nice morning it was, she said yes, wasn't it. I asked her if she was settled in yet. She said it would take time to get things sorted out; and I said yes, it always did. Then we both said goodbye." Satisfied? he added silently.

But she wasn't. "There was no need to have said all that. Good morning would have been enough." Hilda's eyes narrowed. "I think she means trouble."

Arthur was startled. "Trouble? What sort of trouble?"

Hilda leaned forward across the table and punctuated her words with little stabbing movements of her fork. "Well, you tell me this. Why does a woman alone want a great big house like that?"

"Perhaps she has a lot of children and grandchildren who like to come and stay with her." Briefly, Arthur had an enticing vision of the big old house transformed by noise and laughter, imagined how it would be to hear children at play in the garden next door.

"No. That would be bad enough, but you mark my words, it'll be worse than that. Do you know what I think she'll do?"

Start a brothel? thought Arthur hysterically, remembering Mrs. Pettigrew's round pleasant face and warm smile.

"I think she'll take in lodgers," Hilda said. "Lodgers, in Hillside Crescent! Before we know where we are we'll be overrun by layabouts with long hair and noisy motorbikes, making our lives a misery."

"I don't see why you should say that, Hilda. Perhaps she just likes plenty of space." The old, helpless feeling was coming over him again. By now it was a physical sensation that started in his thighs and travelled slowly upwards, paralyzing him so that he felt no more alive than a dressmaker's dummy. However he put it, however he expressed himself, Hilda would disagree with what he said, even if she inwardly agreed with it. And if he took refuge in silence, it was even worse. Hilda would work herself up into a frenzy of frustration.

The truth was that she loved strife, was nourished by it, could not live without it. Perversity was at the very core of her nature. If only, he thought desperately as Hilda launched into a furious denunciation of the idea that any woman could actually choose to live in houses like these—so old, demanding so much maintenance, so much cleaning—if only he could find a way of coming to terms with this terrible need of hers for conflict and more conflict. If he could just accept it, shrug it off, let it flow over his head without affecting him, or even—the thought struck him for the first time—find some way of using it to his own advantage.

It was at this moment that revelation came to him. Suddenly, blindingly, there it was, a shining vision until this moment denied him. Just so must Saint Paul have felt on the road to Damascus.

"What's the matter with you? You're grinning like an idiot."

And there it was, his opening. Carefully, he set his foot upon the road. "I'm sorry, Hilda. I was just smiling at the thought that you sound as if you didn't like this house. You love it, you know you do."

"Love it? What would you know about it? *It* loves *me*, I've no doubt. I'm its slave. Scrubbing it, cleaning it, polishing it, painting it. It swallows up every ounce of energy I've got and still asks for more."

"Come, Hilda, you don't mean that."

"How would you know what I mean? Oh, it's all right for you. You get up, have your breakfast, then you're off for the day. You don't see what I have to do to keep this place looking nice. That's why I'm sure that woman next door is up to no good. No one in her right mind would choose to live in a house like this if she didn't have to."

Deliberately Arthur allowed his features to sag in dismay. "Hilda,

you're not saying you'd ever want to *leave* here, are you?"

As he watched the dawning calculation in her eyes, he prayed that his expression betrayed no hint of the excitement that seethed within him. For a moment he actually felt dizzy at the prospect that his strategy might work.

"Why not?" she said belligerently. "It's far too big for us."

Arthur closed his eyes as if in pain, his mind racing. It was essential that the subject should not be discussed any further at the moment—not until he had had a chance to think, to plan further tactics. "I don't think I feel very hungry at the moment," he said dejectedly. He glanced at Hilda's plate, scraped clean. "If you've finished, I'll clear away." Suddenly he was all solicitude. "Look, you go and sit down and I'll see to all this." Normally after supper she washed the dishes and he dried them. He began to pile the plates on the trolley. "You go and put your feet up and I'll bring you in a cup of coffee in a little while."

Hilda allowed herself to be shepherded into the sitting room and watched him suspiciously as he settled her on the settee, plumped up cushions for her, and adjusted the television set to one of her favorite quiz games. In the kitchen Arthur scraped the remains of his fish pie into a newspaper and put it into the trash, ran a sinkful of soapy water, and began mechanically to wash up—while his mind, free at last, began to explore the dazzling new prospect that had opened up before him.

For Arthur had a dream. A dream of a sanctuary where, free of Hilda's ever-watchful gaze, away from that penetrating nagging voice, he could be at peace to enjoy himself, to indulge himself in all those pleasures that had been denied him for so long; to be able to read a book without constant interruptions, to listen to a whole L.P. without Hilda coming in and turning off the record player without consulting him, to be able to think, just to *be*.

Despite the size of this gaunt Victorian house, Arthur had never managed to find one room that he could call even partly his own. The television set dominated the sitting room, the morning room was permanently set out with chairs and tables for Hilda's whist drives. Upstairs, one of the spare bedrooms was rigidly reserved for guests who never came, one was given over to Hilda's collection of dried flowers, grasses, and seed heads, stored in cases, plastic bags, and boxes of all shapes and sizes, and the other was piled high with useless junk Hilda

steadfastly refused to throw out. "You never know when it might come in useful," she said.

Hints, tentative suggestions, and, finally, outright requests that Arthur be allowed to take over any one of these rooms for a den of his own had been treated with contempt. "What'd you want a room of your own for? You can read in the sitting room, play records in the dining room. It would just be a waste of space." But over the years Arthur had never relinquished the hope that somehow, one day, he might find his sanctuary, and some of his happiest hours had been those when, with Hilda asleep and silent at last, he had been able to plan its furnishing in loving detail.

Now, as he automatically washed the dishes, held them under the hot tap (Hilda couldn't bear detergent stains on crockery), and dried them meticulously with a clean dish towel, he allowed himself to conjure up that vision for just a few seconds before stowing it carefully away at the back of his mind and turning his concentration to the matter of tactics.

First and foremost, of course, he would use the wonderful new weapon he had discovered: the boomerang of Hilda's perversity. He would have to be very careful indeed not to overplay his hand. But at every possible opportunity he would present Hilda's point of view as his own, as forcefully as possible, thus manipulating her into the position of arguing against her own beliefs. He knew how attached she was to this mausoleum. Very well, it would be she who would take the initiative towards finding another house. And once that step was taken, he would systematically enthuse over every property he considered unsuitable, reserving all his opposition for the one he desired. And that one would contain his potential sanctuary—a stout shed at the bottom of the garden, an outbuilding perhaps.

All along he would run the risk of failing to achieve what he most desired, but the possibility that he might be successful was there, the promise of an oasis to a man long exiled in the desert. And he had the most powerful weapon of all to spur him on: even if he failed, he had nothing to lose.

Over the next few days he consciously altered his attitude to Hilda. Instead of being meekly acquiescent he was solicitous. He scurried to fulfill her requests, followed her around with offers of help, fussed over

her comfort, volunteered to do the shopping. Hilda was at first gratified by the attention, then suspicious, and finally frustrated. Deprived of any reason for complaint, she was ripe for a fight. On the evening of the third day, as Arthur was once more settling her on the settee after supper, plumping up cushions, fetching a footstool, turning on the television, pressing her to rest while he washed up, she could stand it no longer.

"What on earth's the matter with you, Arthur?" she demanded, glowering at him suspiciously.

Arthur, waiting for the picture to appear on the screen so that he could adjust it, turned an innocent face toward her, eyes faintly puzzled behind his horn-rimmed spectacles. "The matter, dear?" he said. Nothing in his demeanor even hinted at the fact that far down, in the secret core of his being, he had experienced the same explosion of excitement as a patient angler who sees that first betraying dip of his bob.

"Yes, the *matter*. Why all the fuss?" And she waved an arm at the cushions, the television set, the footstool.

"Oh." Arthur allowed himself to look embarrassed, caught out. Quickly, he appeared to retrieve his composure. "I just want you to be comfortable, that's all, dear."

"What? For heaven's sake turn that thing off. I can't hear a word you're saying." Then, into the ensuing silence, "What did you say?"

Arthur repeated his statement.

"Huh! Think I'm stupid? There's more to it than that, and don't you pretend otherwise. I can read you like a book, Arthur Merritt." Hilda sat up a little straighter, folded her hands in her lap, gave a complacent little wriggle.

Arthur lowered his eyes before her penetrating gaze, shuffled his feet a little, and cleared his throat.

"Oh, do get on with it, Arthur." Hilda gave a long-suffering sigh. "You know you'll tell me in the end. You always do."

Arthur exhibited all the signs of the guilty man forced to reluctant confession; he licked his lips, ran a finger around a collar apparently too tight for him, opened and closed his mouth once or twice as if searching for words to present his offense in a less heinous light. Finally he sat down heavily beside Hilda on the settee. "It's what you said the other night."

Hilda twisted her head sideways to look him in the face. "The other night? What on earth are you talking about?"

"About the house." Arthur got the words out with a difficulty. This was a crucial moment. "That no one in her right mind would choose to live in a house like this if she didn't have to."

Caught in the trap of reiterating in cold blood a statement made in the heat of the moment, Hilda hesitated. Inflexibility won. "Well, what of it?" she said belligerently.

"But you couldn't—you wouldn't—"

"Wouldn't what?" And a gleam appeared in her eye.

"Wouldn't think of *selling* it?" said Arthur hesitantly, a pleading note in his voice.

"Why not?"

"But it's our *home*, Hilda."

"Home is where you make it." The cliché tripped out swiftly enough, but there was a hint of bewilderment in her voice now. Clearly, she was beginning to wonder how she had landed herself in the position of arguing so forcibly against her own beliefs.

Arthur swiftly played his trump card. "You can't mean that, Hilda, you simply can't. I couldn't bear to leave here."

The temptation was too powerful to be resisted. "Why not, if that's the sensible thing to do? What's the point of having a great big place like this for just two people?" Hilda straightened her shoulders, looked with complacency upon Arthur's obvious discomfiture. "A nice little bungalow now, or a cottage, that would be the answer. Something pretty, easy to run. In the country. With a decent garden, to give you something to do when you retire."

"But Hilda. . ."

"No need to rush into it, of course. We could take our time, find exactly the right thing."

Arthur rose, shoulders bent, head lowered, the picture of a defeated man. "I'll go and wash up," he murmured—and escaped to the kitchen where he waltzed silently twice around the room, ending up in front of the mirror where he made faces of strangled jubilation at himself before settling down to his chore. He had done it. Easy now, he told himself, don't let this first success go to your head. You've a long way to go yet.

For a week, he waited. He continued to fuss over Hilda, but now he

had the air of a condemned man. He was nervous and apprehensive, watching her with an uneasiness that was genuine. Would she be satisfied now with keeping him on tenterhooks, or would she act?

On the seventh day his patience was rewarded. He arrived home to find Hilda engrossed in a pile of house agents' details. Stage two had begun.

He decided to modify his strategy. It would not do to enthuse, as he had originally intended, over unsuitable properties. He would have to be more subtle than that if his reluctance was to appear genuine. And so, Saturday after Saturday as they drove around inspecting prospective purchases, he was hangdog, submissive, apathetic. "It's up to you, dear," he would say. "It's what you want that matters," each word and gesture demonstrating his distaste for the whole project. And Hilda held back, her need for a more obvious victory sustaining her in the search.

It was three months before they received the particulars that set the blood pounding in Arthur's temples. "Stone outbuilding 30 feet by 12 feet," he read. "Suitable for workshop, storage, etc." There was also a separate garage and a garden of three quarters of an acre. "Obviously unsuitable," he said, tossing the papers aside.

Hilda snatched them up at once. "How can you tell," she said, the light of battle appearing in her eyes, "without seeing it?"

He mustn't overplay his hand at this point in case the place was, after all, not what he wanted. He shrugged. "We'll just have to see," he said noncommittally.

He hardly slept at all that night, or the following night, and by the time Saturday arrived he felt he really could not have borne to wait a moment longer. This was it. In his bones he knew it. And the moment they arrived his belief was confirmed.

Fate was on his side at last and the house was a chocolate-box cottage with incipient roses around the door. More to the point, it had been modernized and even Hilda would not be able to find fault with the amenities that nestled snugly within the picturesque interior.

There was a new garage, tastefully built of old brick and roofed with old tiles, and right at the bottom of the garden—some hundred yards away from the house and screened from it by a row of fruit trees—was Arthur's sanctuary, just as he had imagined it, down to the last detail. There were stone walls eighteen inches thick, a roof in good repair, the



interior divided into two unequal parts, the smaller of which would serve nicely as a garden shed.

He moved at once into top gear. The house was too small, too old, no doubt riddled with woodworm beneath the immaculate exterior; the garden was too large, the outbuilding a white elephant. It worked like a charm. As if rehearsed, Hilda slipped into the role he had written for her. Arthur was a fool, the house was exactly what they had been looking for, the garden large enough to keep him from being under her feet all day when he retired. A survey would have to be made, of course (she had retained this much of her common sense), but their search was over and they could put their present house on the market at once.

On the way home Arthur pleaded with her, begged her to change her mind, but to no avail—and at no point during the ten weeks they had to wait before completion did he allow anything but reluctance to show. It seemed that at last nothing could go wrong for Arthur. Despite the hesitant state of the market they sold their Victorian monstrosity without difficulty to a young couple with four children, and by mid-July both contracts had been exchanged and they were ready to move.

Arthur was ready in a way unsuspected by Hilda.

The previous owners of the cottage had moved out a month before and despite the immaculate condition of the little house Hilda (remaining at home) had ordered Arthur to spend the intervening weekends decorating the kitchen, main bedroom, and sitting room in colors of her choice. She would not have been quite so complacent if she had known what Arthur was up to.

Unknown to Hilda, Arthur had for the past twenty years received a generous Christmas bonus from Mr. Arkwright. The tradition in the firm was that this money should be handed over in cash, separate from the normal salary. The first time it had happened, Arthur, befuddled by the unaccustomed glasses of wine at the office party, had forgotten to give it to Hilda. When he discovered the satisfying wad of notes in his pocket the next morning, he had wondered if she needed to know. And with the emotions of a criminal on his first job, he had opened a new account in a different bank. The knowledge that he had tucked away a considerable sum of money of which Hilda was unaware

had in the long dreary years been a nugget of comfort to him.

Now, with both means and opportunity to make his dream come true at last, he drew upon this secret well with reckless extravagance. He knew exactly what he wanted and he was prepared to pay for it. He found a small firm of builders, promised them a lavish bonus if they could complete the work by the Saturday before moving day, set one of the men to work decorating the rooms in the house according to Hilda's orders, and spent three blissful Saturdays shopping for his sanctuary.

First he bought a luxurious fitted carpet the color of ripe apricots; then a reclining chair in which he would be able to sit and read in comfort, or lie back relaxed, to soak himself in the classical music he loved. Next he chose a first-rate stereo system, writing the check in an orgasm of delight—then, in swift succession, a radio, a tape recorder, dozens of new records, and a crate of books. He chose an elegant desk and comfortable matching armchair. Then, with discriminating care, spot lights, wall lights with dimmer switches, and two beautiful ceramic table lamps. The lighting was particularly important because he had ordered the one small window in the sanctuary to be bricked in—he was not going to risk Hilda having even a glimpse of his precious secret world. For this reason he spent some time with the electrician, discussing lighting equipment and the relative merits of various extractor fans to provide the necessary ventilation.

These details settled, he turned his attention to the lock on the only door.

He had thought about this endlessly and by now his requirements were quite specific: a lock that was sufficiently sophisticated to defeat the professional criminal and would look ordinary enough to convince the casual burglar that there would be nothing inside worth stealing, and innocent enough to deflect Hilda's curiosity. She had never shown any interest in the garden of their old house and he saw no reason why she should wish to poke around in what would apparently be the garden shed (the smaller room in the outbuilding was, as he had planned, being retained for this purpose), but he was taking no chances.

From the inside, however, his lock would be something very special indeed. The very thought that his sanctuary could be desecrated by an intruder affected Arthur so strongly that he was determined that if this

should ever happen there would be no possibility of that person going unpunished. Having broken in, he would be unable to get out, would be trapped like an animal in a cage until the police arrived. For the inside of the door Arthur wanted the best combination lock that money could buy.

It took three lunchtimes of telephone calls (scrupulously entered in Arkwright's books as private calls) before Arthur found a firm that could meet his requirements, and on their recommendation he relinquished the idea of the stout oak door he had envisaged in favor of a steel one with a built-in lock of the type he wanted.

He was taken into one of the storage sheds to inspect the door of his choice and he eyed it with carefully concealed delight.

"Only two keys, you say?" He ran one finger caressingly over the gleaming metal.

"That's right."

"What about replacements?"

"Only you can get any. The manufacturers file one copy of each key, but they won't reissue without your authorization."

"How easy would it be for anyone to get one of the keys duplicated?"

"Nearly impossible, I'd say. Just a minute." The man left the shed, returned a few minutes later. "Here, you can see for yourself."

Arthur looked with satisfaction upon the intricately cut piece of metal in his hand. "I see what you mean. Fine." He handed the key back. "There's just one more point. Could you paint the door before you install it so that it looks like an ordinary one?"

If the man felt any curiosity he did not show it. No doubt in his business he had come across more unusual requests than this one. "Sure. No problem. What color?"

"Brown, I think," said Arthur. "Yes, brown." A discreet unobtrusive color, perfect for his purpose.

The following Saturday morning—the last Saturday before they were due to move in—the door was installed and when the men had gone Arthur looked about him consideringly. From now on he would never be parted from his key. But the spare—where to put that? He spent half an hour pacing around the garden and then he finally wrapped the duplicate in waxed paper, put it inside an old tobacco tin left behind by one of the workmen, and buried it in the space between the wa-

terbutt and the wall of the outbuilding. Then he looked at his watch. In half an hour his equipment should start arriving.

He walked back to the open door and stood looking in. The builders had accomplished miracles: new floor, new ceiling, newly painted white bookshelves, and honey-colored walls. Mine, thought Arthur with fierce pride.

The next few hours were the happiest he could ever remember. Slowly, before his eyes, his dream became reality, each detail exactly as he had visualized it a thousand times in his imagination. Finally, when the last van had gone, he walked back into the room, switched on the lights and the fan, shut the door (making a mental note to be careful how he did so in future—the metal gave a hollow, revealing clang), and sat down in his beautiful armchair. The cushions received the weight of his body as if they had been made for it and the silence, broken only by the faint hum of the fan, folded about him like a benediction. He looked about him, savoring the pleasure of the peace to come, feasting his eyes upon the books, the stereo, the racks of records, the restful effect of the subdued lighting, the glow of his beautiful carpet. Another week and he would be king of his own domain at last.

The following Saturday they moved in. Arthur dared allow no hint of his elation to show and was well aware that he must do nothing to arouse Hilda's suspicions. He was prepared, if it came to the crunch, to defy her openly, but the longer that moment was delayed the better. And so it was not until after supper on Monday evening that he made his move.

"I think I'll just go and do a bit of gardening," he said as Hilda settled down in front of the television set.

She grunted, did not even look up.

He rationed himself to an hour's bliss before doing some weeding. And so his double life began. All through the summer, the long light evenings were his accomplice. With Hilda planted unsuspecting in front of her beloved television set he enjoyed a freedom he had never known before, a freedom of the mind and spirit that gradually built up in him an inner core of hard determination that nothing, nothing at all, was going to take this away from him now. Nevertheless it was with sinking heart that he watched, day by day, the hour of twilight grow

earlier and earlier. By mid-September he was braced daily for the inevitable question.

It came.

"What on earth have you been doing out there, Arthur? It's been dark for the last hour."

He had his reply ready. "It's much darker in the house than it is outside." He introduced a grumbling note into his voice. "There's a lot to do in a garden this size."

Hilda was satisfied. As long as Arthur was not happy, that was fine by her. But he knew that this state of affairs could not last long. No gardener, dedicated or reluctant, can work when it's pitch dark. The confrontation came a week later.

It happened to be a Friday. Hilda had dished up the fish pie and Arthur was once more looking rebelliously at the shreds of pallid cod sticking up through the tasteless white sauce and lumpy mashed potato. Preoccupied with his distaste, the attack caught him unprepared.

"What's in that shed at the bottom of the garden, Arthur?" Hilda shovelled a large forkful of pie into her mouth and chewed vigorously.

Arthur transferred his gaze from the pie to the equally distasteful sight of Hilda eating it. There was a large glutinous blob of sauce on her lower lip and he watched, sickened, as her thick red tongue slid out and retrieved the offending morsel. "What did you say?" he said, playing for time.

"That shed at the bottom of the garden. What's in it?" she repeated.

"Tools," he said briefly. And took a tiny mouthful of the pie.

"But it's huge. It can't be full of tools. And there are two doors," she added accusingly.

"Two toolsheds," lied Arthur. "Well, actually, one's a toolshed, the other's a workshop."

"Oh, a workshop," Hilda said. And then, "What sort of a workshop?"

"Just a workshop." Arthur's tone was dismissive.

But Hilda had unerringly sensed his reluctance to say more.

"You can show it to me in the morning," she said with an air of finality.

There was a long silence.

Eventually, "No," said Arthur.

Hilda stopped chewing. Her mouth dropped slightly open and Ar-

thur had a brief disgusting view of her tongue coated with lumps of half-masticated fish before her lips closed like a trap. "What did you say?"

"No," Arthur repeated. He took a deep breath, conscious of his heart hammering away beneath his sober grey waistcoat. "I'm not going to show you my workshop."

Hilda's face seemed to swell, frog-like, before she said, through her teeth, "Why not?"

"Because I don't wish to show it to you," returned Arthur. And waited for the storm to break.

"You don't wish to— Why, you puny pathetic little man . . . If I want to see it, I jolly well will, and nothing's going to stop me." For a good five minutes she ranted and raved while Arthur sat with head bowed, weathering the storm. He didn't care what she said, what she did. Nothing, no power on earth, was going to make him open that door for her. He waited until she had finished and then, his calm voice betraying no hint of the real state of his emotions, he said firmly, "I'm sorry, Hilda. I'm not going to change my mind." Then, emboldened by his own courage and realizing that he had burnt his boats anyway, he gestured at his plate. "And as I've said before, I don't like fish pie." Then he walked out.

In the sanctuary he sank into his armchair and closed his eyes. He felt both shattered and elated. He had done it. He had really stood up to her at last. And there was absolutely nothing she could do about it. Life would be hell, no doubt, but it was worth it when he knew he had this beautiful impregnable bolt-hole to run for. If necessary he could wash his own clothes, darn his own socks, and—yes, why not?—install a small cooker over there below the extractor fan. He could eat here, if he wished. Come to think of it, he could even, if life became truly intolerable, sleep here.

But strangely, the necessity to make such arrangements did not arise. When he got back to the house Hilda had already gone to bed and throughout the weekend she was alarmingly docile. Arthur found out why when he went down to the sanctuary on Monday evening. There were deep scratches in the paint around the lock on the door. Cursing, he anxiously tried the key and breathed a sigh of relief to find the lock undamaged. And one glance around the room showed that his

sanctuary was still inviolate.

Neither of them mentioned the subject that evening.

At half-past nine the following morning Arthur received a telephone call from the manager of the firm which had supplied and installed the door.

"I've had your wife on the phone, Mr. Merritt. She. . ." the voice hesitated, stumbled a little over the words. "It's rather a delicate matter, really. She says that you have lost the keys to your—er—workshop and she wants us to send someone out to break the lock. But as I told you, we will only do this at the specific request of the person who has purchased it. So I thought I would ring you first, to confirm. I do hope you don't mind. . ."

"Of course not," Arthur said firmly. "I'm glad you did. My wife was. . ." and he paused deliberately, ". . . mistaken. The keys are not lost, and I do not want the lock broken."

"Right. Thank you, sir. So long as we know where we are. Sorry to trouble you, but your wife was most insistent."

"I'm sure she was," Arthur murmured after he had put the phone down. Then he buried his head in his hands and sat for some time, thinking hard. He knew Hilda. She was not going to be easily deflected from her purpose. She would keep trying until she found a less scrupulous locksmith. He wouldn't even put it past her to get hold of an acetylene torch and burn her way through the door—or hire someone to do it for her. He would have to think of a powerful deterrent; quickly.

Suddenly inspiration came. He reached for the Yellow Pages, found a likely looking number, and dialed. The solicitor, persuaded by Arthur's urgency to give an off-the-cuff opinion, listened carefully and eventually pronounced his verdict: it would be most unlikely that Arthur would be successful in obtaining an injunction to prevent Hilda gaining access to his workshop, but they could certainly try if Arthur was prepared to see his money wasted. Arthur was. He rang off, dialed Hilda's number.

"Arthur here. I've just had the locksmith on the phone. Now just you listen to me, Hilda," he said before she could speak. "I've taken legal advice—I mean it, you can check if you like—it's Marren, Marren and Wright. If you persist in trying to get into my workshop, I shall take you to court, get an injunction to stop you. If you don't mind our



little disagreement being made public, go right ahead."

The telephone receiver made incoherent spluttering noises.

"I told you, Hilda, and I mean it." And he put the phone down.

It worked like a charm. The subject was not mentioned again. And now Arthur came and went openly to his sanctuary, reveling in his new security—and in the fact that fish pie had disappeared from the supper menu on Friday evenings. But all the time he was on the alert for Hilda's next move. She might pretend to have forgotten, might apparently choose to ignore the subject, but he knew in his bones that underneath she was waiting, watching for her opportunity. He wore the key of the sanctuary around his neck, never took it off except to have a shower or take a bath, and even then he took it into the bathroom with him. He was taking no chances.

This state of affairs continued throughout the autumn and well into the new year. And then, one day in February Arthur arrived at work to find Mr. Arkwright doubled up over his desk, clutching his stomach.

Arthur rushed across to him, bent over him solicitously. "Mr. Arkwright! Are you all right? I'll call a doctor!" Already he was reaching for the telephone.

Mr. Arkwright nodded without speaking and then, when Arthur had put down the receiver, raised a face contorted with pain. "But the Singapore contract, Arthur," he managed to say. And they stared at each other in dismay. Mr. Arkwright was due to fly out that evening, to spend a fortnight with their business associates in Singapore. The deal was all set up, had taken months to prepare. He and Arthur had worked on it together, going over the details with meticulous care. "If . . . if I can't go, you'll have to, in my place."

Arthur stared at him, speechless. Fly to Singapore? By himself? He couldn't, he just couldn't! He'd never flown in his life before. He opened his mouth to protest.

"You must, Arthur, you must!" Mr. Arkwright groaned, clutching his stomach, and waiting until the spasm of pain had gone. "There's no one else who knows enough about it. And we can't waste all that work . . . all the new machinery."

As if in a dream Arthur found himself agreeing.

"You've got a passport?"

Arthur nodded. "From that week in Germany with you, last year."

The only time he had set foot on foreign soil.

"Good. We'll see what the doctor says and talk later."

Arthur hovered helplessly until the doctor arrived, diagnosed acute appendicitis, and made arrangements for Mr. Arkwright's immediate admission to hospital. A hurried conference with Mr. Arkwright and then Arthur was left alone with the weight of the firm's future on his reluctant shoulders.

A brief phone call to Hilda (who, knowing on which side her bread was buttered, agreed without demur to pack for him) and he plunged into work. So much to do, so little time in which to do it. The plane was leaving at 9:30 that evening and it was arranged that Arthur should be picked up by taxi at 8.

When he arrived home at 7:45 he felt hot, sticky, and grubby and, despite Hilda's protests that he would miss his plane, he took a shower, prudently switching to cold water for the last few minutes to close his pores against the night air. There was no time to eat, no time to do anything but fling himself into the clean clothes that Hilda had laid out on the bed, and grab his suitcase.

In the taxi at last, he leaned back against the comfortable upholstery and relaxed. He had made it. If anything went wrong now it would not be his fault. He did not relish the prospect of this trip, but he would do his best. The worst part would be being deprived of the solace of his sanctuary for two weeks. Automatically his fingers felt for the reassuring little lump beneath his shirt.

It wasn't there.

For a second he sat paralyzed with shock and then, leaning forward, he rapped frantically on the glass partition. "Can you go back, please? I've forgotten something."

If the driver was annoyed, he didn't show it. No doubt he was used to passengers who forgot things. Without a word he did a U-turn and accelerated back the way they had come.

Arthur sat forward on the edge of the seat, every nerve straining ahead to the house, to the bathroom, the key. Surely Hilda wouldn't have found it already. His nails bit into the palms of his hands as he clenched his fists in an agony of impatience.

The taxi had scarcely drawn to a halt before Arthur was out of it, halfway up the path. He tore in through the back door, which was unlocked as usual, and up the stairs into the bathroom, one desperate

part of his mind registering the fact that Hilda was nowhere to be seen and the television was silent.

The key was gone. Out again, into the garden, running still. Halfway down the path he heard the familiar clang of the sanctuary door. He was too late!

He slowed down, stumbled the last few paces, and stood, head bowed, his hands pressed flat against the cold surface of the door, overwhelmed by a sense of loss and desolation so acute that he almost cried out with the pain of it. Hilda had won.

Or had she?

Arthur's head came up with a jerk. Apart from his own rapid uneven breathing, there was no sound. The night was still and overcast. The bare branches of the trees at the bottom of the garden rose stiff and motionless against the dense greyness of the sky.

Then he moved. He turned, walked across the lawn, down the front path to the waiting taxi. The driver leaned back to open the door for him.

"Got it, guv?" he said.

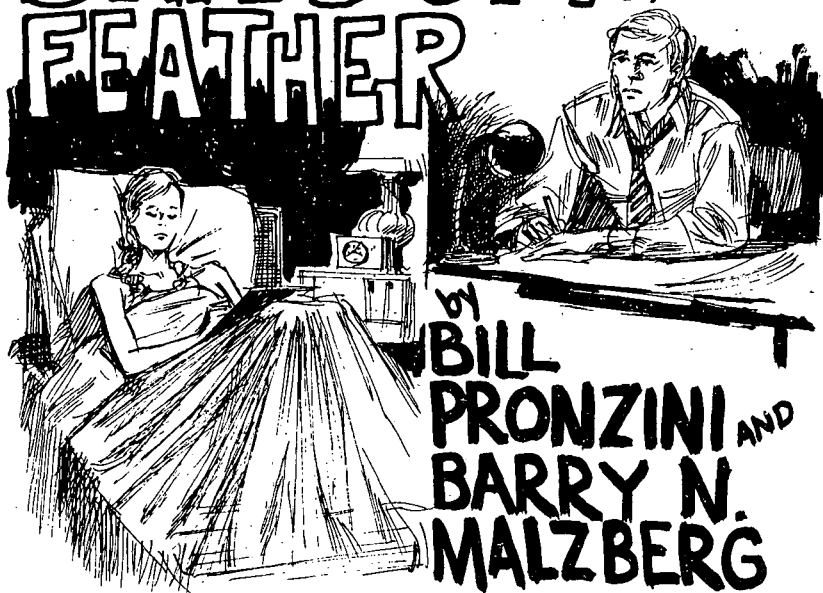
Arthur nodded. "Yes, thank you." His voice was steady. "Think we can still make it?"

He caught his plane with minutes to spare.



*Each had the same problem, to get out . . .*

# BIRDS OF A FEATHER



**A**ugust 16

Dear Marjorie:

As always, I was enchanted by your letter. Thanks to the Miss Emma Social Club, I have finally found a woman who understands me, and I hope you feel the same about me. We are truly birds of a feather, for we care a great deal about each other even though we have never met face to face. Someday soon, we shall.

I am writing this once again in my office at State Unemployment. Through the door I can see the passage of the colorless little people who are my fellow workers. None of them have, as do you, the soul to comprehend the real Walter Taylor, the difficult joys, sorrows, and passions which govern me.

No, none of them know me. None of them know I go to bars alone at night and watch sports telecasts, how I sit alone in my apartment and watch the endless small torments of city life below—none know of my humanity, or even that *they* are human. They barely sense that they are alive.

But I have plans.

I tell you, Marjorie, I have plans.

August 18

Dear Walter:

I know what you mean about us being birds of a feather. We really are, aren't we?

I have plans too, but sometimes I wonder if I'll ever get to do any of them. I have my sick aunt, about whom I have told you too much already, to take care of all the time. Then there's my job in the beauty parlor. Between the two of them, my aunt and the job, it's too much for me to bear sometimes.

Take yesterday, for instance. This woman, this blonde who must be about 43, came into the salon. She was wearing false eyelashes and pants, and trying to look eighteen. She was ridiculous. She says to me, "I want bangs, Marjorie. Give me bangs." I wanted to say to her, "Listen, with bangs they'll put you in a cage in the zoo downtown," but she's a good customer. She comes in once a week and always tips me two dollars. The average here is about fifty cents, so that's very good. So I only said, "Look, Mrs. Blodgett, the youthful look is not for people of your mature years."

Well, the look she gave me! And then she insisted that I give her bangs anyway. So I did it because you just cannot reason with people like that, and she went out looking sixty-five instead of forty-three. People just don't know what they look like to others.

The same is true of my aunt. I mean here she is; she looks like a hundred years old, and yet she always wears a ton-and-a-half of makeup, like she's going to a masquerade or something. She has ar-

thrititis and water on the knee and a lot of other things too disgusting to talk about, and all she does is make demands on me. Marjorie-do-this and Marjorie-do-that. Hand and foot I have to wait on her. Sometimes I can't stand it so bad I want to just walk out and leave her alone. But I can't because she's my only living relative and me hers, and when she dies I'll inherit all her money and the house and stuff. It isn't much really, but it's better than nothing. Which is what I would have if I walked out. How could I walk out, Walter?

August 21

Dear Marjorie:

You're right of course that people don't know what they look like. One's internal image is not the same as what one presents to the world.

There is a big mirror in the bank where I cash my check every other Thursday, for instance, and plenty of time for me to look at myself on the line, as I happened to be doing just this morning. I saw a handsome man, I thought, a man in his early fifties with a certain *je ne sais quoi*, rather like an aging movie star. And yet inside I do not feel handsome because I am being smothered by the emptiness of my job and my life, all of my humanity draining away.

I would do anything to break free of the ties that bind me. But what can I do? I have nothing but your letters, it seems. Are they enough? Sometimes I believe they are. Other times—

Other times, Marjorie, I know I must find a way to alter my life. There is so much more in this world than this small little corner.

But how? This is the question that plagues me, as the poet said.

How?

August 23

Dear Walter:

I just don't know what I'm going to do about my aunt. Things are getting out of hand. Now she says she's got back pains and can't get out of bed. The doctor says there's nothing wrong with her, but she won't get out of bed. She makes me wait on her hand and foot. Last night I had to run bedpans and bring her hot water bottles and all kinds of pills and stuff. I didn't get any sleep at all—not even one hour—can you imagine that?

Well, anyway, I think your letters are wonderful, and I'm glad we have each other to talk to like this, even if it isn't talking face to face. There's nobody else I can talk to, nobody else I can get it all off my chest to, you know?

August 26

Dear Marjorie:

You have to take risks in order to achieve the goals that really matter. This is what I have come to understand. I took a risk in joining the Miss Emma Social Club, in daring to write you so openly and freely, and in return I have found someone who understands me as no one ever has—someone with whom I often feel I could share my life. That was a great risk because despite my handsome appearance I am a rather shy man and I find it hard to open up and express my feelings. But the risk was worth taking, for what I have found teaches a lesson that I have come to learn: if one would get anywhere in this world one must extend oneself. The alternative is to be like those who surround you.

One must *dare!*

August 30

Dear Walter:

I got fired from the salon today. Can you believe that? They actually *fired* me because I said something to fat old Mrs. Landers when she wanted to have her hair dyed jet black. "You're too old to have jet-black hair, Mrs. Landers," I said to her. "It'll make you look like one of those women down on the waterfront who try to pick up sailors." I couldn't help myself. It was the truth, and I just had to say it. Mrs. Landers screamed to Monsieur Jacques and he fired me. After six years on the job, he fired me on the spot. Can you imagine?

Then I came home and tried to tell my aunt what had happened, and all she could talk about was her back, her arthritis, her water on the knee, and the other stuff. I can't stand much more of it. Yet now that I'm fired I'll have to stay home all day and listen to her complaining and ordering me around. I won't even be able to look forward to getting *out*.

I don't know what to do, Walter. I mean, I just don't know what to do!



September 10

Dear Marjorie:

I'm sorry for the delay in writing but things have not gone at all well for me in the past few days.

I took the risk I was telling you about, Marjorie, and I failed.

The risk, you see, was an idea that came to me as I was standing in line at the bank last time, looking at myself in the mirror. I thought about all the money in the cash drawers, and how that money would buy me escape and freedom and a new existence. I thought and thought about robbing the bank and finally, last Friday, I went ahead and did it. But I was caught and am now in jail awaiting arraignment.

Don't think badly of me, Marjorie. I was compelled—I had to go through with it. I just had to!

Please write and say you understand. I need to hear from you now more than ever.

September 10

Dear Walter:

I should have written earlier but I haven't been up to writing letters the past couple of days. I mean, I'm in jail and you don't feel like writing letters in jail. But you'll get worried if you don't hear from me, and you would have no way of knowing.

I guess you're going to hate me, but I tried to poison my aunt, Walter. I gave her a whole bottle of sleeping pills. Only she didn't die, she just got sick and screamed. When they took her to the hospital and found the pills in her stomach, they arrested me for attempted murder.

It was really stupid, I admit it.

Walter, please don't stop writing to me, no matter what happens. Your letters, your strength, are all I ever had.

**The May issue of *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* will be on sale April 18.**

*Her life was in ashes long before the fire . . .*

# A MATTER OF ARSON

by  
**LAWRENCE TREAT**



After the fire one windowless room of the house still stood, slippery underneath, smelling of burnt wood and drenched with a wet, watery, oily black slush. Inside the ruin, a few articles of smoke-damaged furniture remained for the taking.

Kids stared at the mess. A few scavengers rummaged through the meager pickings and took whatever pleased them. A raw thinnish man with a long nose hovered over a bureau. Bending down, he studied the

hardware, ran his hand over the black smudge, and found the brasswork underneath. Careless of the way the bureau smeared his clothes, he lugged it across the floor, slid it to the ground, and hauled it to a blue station wagon with the sign, CLARK RAMSDELL, PLUMBING CONTRACTOR.

Later in the day the fire marshal sifted the ruins and, in the course of determining the probable cause as arson, found the body of a woman charred beyond recognition. She was curled up in the foetal position and clutching some green glass that had melted into a shapeless mass.

The marshal called Chief Dan Moorhead of Morgan County, who arrived within the next twenty minutes. He assumed that the body was that of Livia London who had owned and occupied the house. Subsequently the medical examiner decided that death was probably due to smoke inhalation. By evening Dan had questioned Livia's husband and her houseman, both of whom had seen her on the previous day.

At 9:00 P.M. Dan walked into the Right Side Bar & Grill in Le Page County, just across the state line, and headed for his usual booth to the right of the door. Chief Willy Wharton of Le Page County was hunched over the table and cradling his glass of beer in one hand. He seemed to be made of pure granite, hacked out of a quarry, and fashioned with broad, slashing strokes. Dan, sitting down opposite him, had a softer face and outweighed Willy by ten or fifteen pounds.

Dan said nothing until he'd taken a long gulp of ice-cold beer. Then he made a face. "Lousy," he said. "And a lousy day."

Willy nodded sympathetically. Since this wasn't his case he could afford to be philosophical about it. "These arson cases are tough to prove."

"Arson, hell!" Dan said. "This is homicide. Murder in the first degree."

"Who says?"

Dan patted his ample belly. "Me. My gut." When Willy tried to shrug off the statement, Dan said, "You didn't know her. Livia London. She used to have a yacht and houses in Cannes and Miami and New York."

"And after a terrible automobile accident she retired to Tiffin," Willy added. "Population three hundred. I know all about her. She lost half

of her face. After the accident she stayed in Tiffin and never left it."

"Ever see her?" Dan asked.

"No. Did you?"

"No, and neither did anybody else, except Cholly Hupp, who lived there and was her houseman, chauffeur, general factotum, and maybe a couple of other things."

"What's he like?"

"Round. Round face and round body. He'd bounce nicely and come up laughing, which is what he does mostly. He probably laughs in his sleep too. The question is, is he laughing off a homicide or is he always that way?"

"Where was he when the fire started?"

"He claims he spent the night with Seraphina Brickell at the Good Samaritan Motel, and he did. I guess you know her track record. A hundred dollars a night, recommended customers only. I spoke to her and Cholly, and their stories check in every detail, but how do I know he didn't duck out of the motel for an hour or so and do a torch job? She says she slept all night. He says he slept until two A.M., when he heard the fire whistle and went to Tiffin, along with the rest of the volunteer fire department."

"Why would Cholly go in for arson?"

"I don't know. Maybe the strain of his job. The ambience."

"Amby-what?"

Dan spread his hand on the table. "The surroundings," he said. "Everything about the place. It was like living with a ghost, and maybe it got to him. For instance, the way he hardly ever saw her. She spoke to him through doors or through an intercom, and if he had to come into a room, he was instructed to knock first. If she was there, she usually told him to wait a minute so she'd have time to disappear."

"Didn't he ever see her?" Willy asked.

"Once in a while, at night and at a distance, but even then she always wore a veil." Dan pulled his hand back as if he felt ashamed of its good solid strength. "There were no mirrors in the house," he said. "None at all, except the one that Cholly had at his end of the house. That's the part that's still standing. It's damaged and most of the roof caved in, but the walls are still upright. It's the last section the fire hit."

"The radio said you'd questioned her husband," Willy said.

"Yeah, Tony London, a hundred and twenty pounds of him, stretched out over seventy-four inches. I figure he works on strings, like a puppet."

"What does he do?"

"Collects fifteen grand from her, in two annual installments. He visits her twice a year, and each time he spends the night. He has to wait until dark before she lets him in, and once he's inside he finds her sitting in a dark room with all the shades down, wearing that veil. They talk about money and drink champagne. She must have had a bottle of it in her arms when the smoke got her."

"Then she was probably drunk by the time the fire started. What does London say?"

"That he left early. Here's the sequence, Willy, the way Hupp and London tell it. In the afternoon Cholly iced a few magnums of champagne and put them in a cooler and left them in front of her door, then beat it to see Seraphina. I have witnesses to his departure and to London's arrival, which was around seven. He claims she was drunk already and they had an argument and she kicked him out, and after that he was nowhere near the vicinity."

"What was the argument about?"

"Money. He said she wanted to cut his allowance and he told her he didn't need her money, he had a job offer and expected to take it. He says he told her he was tired of being dependent on her."

"Do you believe him?" Willy asked.

"Not all of it, but I think they did have an argument and that he left a few hours before the fire. He had a magnum of Piper-Heidsieck with him. He parked on a side road in the state forest and drank the full bottle and woke up this morning with a hangover. His car was spotted twice during the course of the night, but there's nothing to say he didn't drive back and set the fire between those two times when he was seen. Willy, these are kooks, all of them, but you've got to feel sorry for Livia and that face of hers and I'm going to hang somebody for it. But who?"

"The first day's always the toughest," Willy said. "Go home and sleep on it. The cases you don't solve in the first hour or so come slow. You got to squeeze the juice out of them, drop by drop, like an old lemon."

"I wish I could drop the whole business in your lap. Why do I al-

ways get the tough ones, while you take it easy in Le Page? Half the time I earn my salary and yours too."

"Sure," Willy said. "Makes you a damn saint, so don't talk about it. Saints are modest."

"This beer," Dan said, scowling, "is lousy, and gets lousier with every sip."

"You bet," Willy said, and finished his own beer with gusto.

The following morning an insurance adjuster showed up at Dan's office and introduced himself. "I'm Oliver Wenzel," he said. "I'd like to go through the ruins and I'd appreciate it if one of your men could come along with me to verify anything I find."

"Glad to help out," Dan said, "but I think you can save yourself some time by starting with the fire marshal. He has all the information about the house and the fire."

"I'm not too interested in the house," Wenzel said, "but we carried a quarter of a million dollars' worth of insurance on her jewelry, and I'm hoping to recover enough of it to reduce our losses."

"I wish you luck," Dan said, "but I understand it was a pretty hot fire. What does that do to jewelry?"

"You never know," Wenzel said, "which is why I have to be thorough about my search. Only first, I want to make sure the stuff was in the house at the time of the fire, and particularly a necklace of hers that was insured for one-fifty. I have a picture of it here, courtesy of the people she bought it from."

Dan gave the photograph a casual glance. "Let me have a copy," he said. "And I'll send Robinson along with you. You can rely on him."

Robinson, however, did a lot more than stand around and watch an insurance man sift the ruins in the hope of finding the remains of some jewelry. He asked questions, and on the basis of the answers he reported to Dan.

"Chief," he said, "the kids around here, they tell me Ramsdell, that's the plumber, maybe you know him—"

"Sure. What about him?"

"He was hanging around the ruins yesterday morning and carted off some stuff. He did it while the place was still smoking."

"I'll get hold of him," Dan said . . .

Ramsdell looked nervous when he came into Dan's office. His long nose seemed to sniff trouble. He sat down gingerly on the edge of a chair and answered questions in a low voice that at times was almost inaudible.

"I hear you took some things from the London house," Dan said.

Ramsdell nodded, and when Dan asked him what he mumbled, "Stuff. Nothing much."

"What?"

"An old bureau. Brass hardware on it."

"What made you go to the ruin?"

"Nothing. I just wanted to see."

"You like fires, don't you?"

Ramsdell clasped his hands, unclasped them. "Fires—you never know. You find things. Fittings."

"And bureaus?" Ramsdell didn't answer and Dan said, "What was in the bureau?"

"Clothes. Belonged to Hupp. I told him to come over and get them, so he did. Expensive shirts, but just junk now. They're scorched, no good. Wouldn't fit me anyhow."

"You tried them on?"

"No. They tore in two when you picked them up. Two drawerfuls, ruined."

"Two drawers?" Dan said. "A two-drawer bureau?"

"Three. Nice hardware. The top drawer's stuck, got to dry out some, but I got the lock out. Good lock."

"How could you get the lock out without opening the drawer?"

"It opened a couple of inches. There's nothing inside it though. It's empty. I could see that much."

Dan told himself he'd reached a dead end on the bureau.

"You did the plumbing for Mrs. London, didn't you?"

Ramsdell nodded and looked away.

Sensing something, Dan said, "When was the last time you were there?" Ramsdell muttered something unintelligible. "When?" Dan repeated.

"Well, you see—"

"When?"

"The night before."

"You mean the night of the fire?"



Ramsdell studied the floor, then nodded.

"When did you arrive," Dan asked, "and exactly when did you leave? You have a time sheet and people know your truck, I can get the answers right down to the minute, but you'll be a lot better off if you tell me. And whom and what you saw."

At the end of Ramsdell's story he said, "You won't tell the papers, will you? Or the radio? It would ruin me, and I'm having trouble right now. You won't tell, will you?"

Dan didn't tell the papers. Instead, he told Willy that night, while they were sitting in their booth at the Right Side Bar & Grill.

"I had a talk with Ramsdell," Dan said. "That man can't even talk in sentences."

"What did he have to say?" Willy asked.

"It seems he has a little racket," Dan said. "If you call him for something simple that ought to take ten or fifteen minutes he claims a few other things have to be done. He charges by the hour and kites up his charges by two or three hours. He usually goes down to the cellar and pretends he's on the job for as long as he's there, which is what he did at the London place."

"What does he do down in the cellar? Take a snooze?"

"Sometimes. And sometimes he just listens, which is what he did at the London place. He was there from about five o'clock to eight, and he says he heard Cholly leave and Tony London come and go."

"Sounds like you got a nice break."

"Well," Dan said, "you know the way voices will sometimes go up or down a pipe, they'll be audible from one part of a room and in another part of the room the people might as well be talking in Azerbaijan."

"What's that? A new language?"

"It's a Soviet republic and a province in Iran. Take your choice."

"I'll stay here," Willy said. "So what happened? Seems that Ramsdell can tell you anything he wants to, he can make things up and hold out on whatever suits him. What did he say?"

"That London came in and made some remark about her starting in to drink too early in the day. A champagne cork popped and then he didn't hear anything for about ten minutes."

"Because they were in another part of the room?"

"Who knows? But by and by he heard her tell London she was short

of money and the only way she could work things out was for him to come live with her. He said 'With that face?' They started yelling at each other, and after about fifteen or twenty minutes London left. When Ramsdell thought the coast was clear, he climbed back upstairs and sneaked out without seeing anybody. That's his whole story."

"What time did he leave?"

"Around eight," Dan said. "I checked with his wife, and he got home around eight-thirty. With the state the body was in, the M.E. can't guess at the time of death. Even his smoke-inhalation diagnosis is guesswork—all he's really sure of is that she wasn't shot and no bones were broken. I'm going on the theory that she was alive at eight when Ramsdell left, and that she died in the fire, which was going full blast at two A.M. There's no telling when it started, but the odds are it was around midnight."

"Well now, you got yourself a nice little puzzle," Willy said. "If Ramsdell is giving it to you straight, then London or Cholly is lying. But if Cholly and London are telling the truth, Ramsdell's the one. He had the opportunity."

"They all did. Each one of them could have set the fire that killed her. But something else has turned up. It seems Livia had some valuable jewelry. The insurance agent is trying to check it out. He found most of her stuff in the ruins—some of the gold's melted and the gem stones ain't what they used to be—but a necklace worth a hundred and fifty grand is missing. Want to see a picture of it?"

He handed Willy the copy that Wenzel had given him, and Willy studied it as if he was an expert jeweler and lapidary. Turning it sideways, squinting at it, and rubbing his fingers along the glossy surface.

"Diamonds?" he said. Dan nodded and Willy said, "It would look pretty nice on Katie, except she doesn't go in for jewelry."

"The idea of Livia, who couldn't stand to look at herself, walking around the house and wearing that thing—it's spooky, isn't it?"

"Do you think she was wearing it that night?" Willy asked. "If she was, then London or Ramsdell or Cholly could have taken it and then gone and set the fire to hide the larceny."

"So far," Dan said, "that's pretty much my theory. If we're right, about all I can do is wait for the necklace to show up, and try to trace it back to whichever one of the three sold it, or tried to."

"That might take a year or more."

"Might," Dan admitted. "In the meantime, I'm putting a tail on all three of them, twenty-four hours a day." He took a slip of paper from his pocket and handed it to Willy. "In case any of them drive over to Le Page, here are the license numbers and descriptions of their cars. Ramsdell lives in Le Page, so you could start spotting him in the morning when he starts out and see where he goes."

"I'll do that," Willy said. "Get yourself a good night's sleep, and I'll put the watch on Ramsdell."

At 3:00 A.M. Willy's bedside phone rang. He reached out and dragged the receiver to his ear. "Wharton," he growled.

"Robinson here. That kid of mine—the one who wants to be a detective and is always helping me—he decided to go on night duty and watch the Ramsdell house. A little while ago he sees somebody drive by and douse his lights, then park off the road and start for the house. He sees whoever it is go in the back door, and then he calls me."

"That kid of yours," Willy said. "He's O.K."

"I checked the car. It's Hupp's, and it looks like he's in Ramsdell's house right now. What do I do?"

"Stay put," Willy said. "I'll be right over."

Katie, waking up, said, "William. What's happening?"

"One of Dan's cases came across the line and plunked itself in my lap. Why can't people stay in Morgan where they belong?"

"William," she said vaguely, and was asleep before she could say his name again.

Robinson, a drowsy man with a drooping mustache, was just one more shadow among the many that seemed to camouflage his car. He shrank back when Willy's headlights picked him up. Willy braked, parked behind Robinson's car, and switched the headlights off.

"Where's that kid of yours?" Willy asked.

"I sent him home. I don't want him around if there's any trouble." He pointed at the house. "Hupp's still in there, you can see his flashlight every once in a while. He was nosing around downstairs, but he's in the cellar now. Look—there's his light in the cellar window."

"Chances are the bedrooms are upstairs," Willy said. "If he goes up, there could be a confrontation and we'd have to go in and take him. Otherwise let's wait till he comes out. Where's his car?"

"On the other side of that signpost. Any idea what he's after?"

"I'd say a necklace, except who looks for a necklace in a cellar?"

Robinson didn't answer. Staring into the darkness, Willy said, "If he comes out the back door and heads over to the left, we could lose him. You'd better go and wait at his car. If he shows up there it'll mean I missed him and it's up to you to nab him."

Robinson turned and walked off noiselessly. One moment he was standing next to Willy, the next he'd melted into the shadows. Like a zombie, Willy told himself, and wished he had a few more zombies like Robinson.

When Hupp left the house, his roly-poly figure was outlined against the whiteness of the driveway. He came forward confidently and just before he reached the road Willy snapped on his flashlight and caught him squarely in the beam.

"Police," Willy said. "Put your hands up and walk forward, slowly."

"Why not?" Cholly said.

He seemed relaxed as Willy frisked him and found no weapon.

"What were you doing in there?" Willy asked.

Cholly laughed.

"Look," Willy said. "We saw you go in, we saw you making a search—that's breaking and entering, with criminal intent."

"I didn't break in," Cholly said. "The door wasn't locked."

"It doesn't have to be. It was closed. That makes it a breaking."

Cholly laughed again.

"Criminal trespass," Willy said.

"That's a misdemeanor," Cholly said.

"O.K., so it's a misdemeanor. But breaking and entering at night, with criminal intent, that's a felony, and it's five years. What were you after?"

Cholly laughed. Whereupon Willy made the formal arrest and locked him up in the county jail for the night.

"You couldn't really call it a laugh," Willy said to Dan at the Right Side that evening.

"Loud?" Dan said.

"No. Kind of a —well, sort of a —"

"So what was he after?" Dan asked. "What did he expect to find?"

"It has to be the necklace," Willy said, "but I couldn't break him down. When he gets through laughing, maybe I can get it out of him, but he's a tough nut to crack. What I need is a break of some kind."

Judging by his grin the following evening when he arrived at the Right Side Bar & Grill he had had it. "Dan," he said happily, "you know what? Katie burnt the beans."

"So?"

"First time it ever happened. Here she is, the best cook in Le Page—wins prizes at the county fair—and she comes a cropper over a pot of beans."

"Are you trying to kid me?" Dan said.

Willy shook his head, but he kept on grinning. "It was worse than that. She burned the whole dinner. We had to go out and eat."

"Well?" Dan said, scowling. "Stop clowning around. What are you trying to tell me?"

"What was the word you used the other day? Ambience? I'm giving you the ambience. So think of her there in the kitchen, making dinner on her new stove. Have you seen any of these new stoves lately?"

"I'd appreciate it," Dan said, "if you'd get to the point."

"The point," Willy said, "is the way they make these new stoves. You can set them automatically, you can start them high and program them to turn to low all by themselves. They've got automatic features and timers and you can dial them to do whatever you want them to do. They grill and barbecue and spit and roast, and they vent themselves and you can't even see where the heat comes from. You can even cook on them if you push the right buttons."

"So what about it?"

"All those buttons," Willy said, "they scare her. They look like the cockpit of a plane. So there she is, making one of those bean casseroles of hers, and the phone rings. And you know who it was? The hospital!"

"Where the hell does that come in?"

"Dan, one of the things I teach my men is never to scare people. Never start off saying this is the police, there's been an accident. Never say, like they did to Katie, this is the hospital and your sister has had an accident. It scares people. You want to avoid that kind of a shock. Suppose Katie had a heart condition?"

"If you're finished with the lecture, maybe you'll tell me what happened."

"I just did. They told Katie her sister had an accident and was in the hospital, and Katie beat it over there."

"How is her sister?"

"She twisted her ankle and they thought it was a break, but it turned out just to be a bad sprain, so Katie took her home from the hospital. That was when she remembered the beans."

"What about them? She turned off the stove before she left, didn't she?"

"She thought she did, but in her excitement she must have pushed the wrong button. Maybe a few of them. They've got directions printed all over the stove and an instruction book to tell you all about it, but Katie was in a hurry and didn't have time to sit down and read about what a wonderful stove she had."

"So your dinner got burnt. What about it?"

"Burnt?" Willy said. "You should have seen the place. It's lucky the house didn't burn down. There was all this smoke—smoke from the beans, smoke from the bacon, smoke from a bunch of other junk including a wooden bowl that got charred up. There was black smoke all over the kitchen walls. Katie spent the rest of the day cleaning. The walls in back of the stove, the counter, a drawer that was left open. Half the stuff in that drawer was coated with heavy black gook."

"What are you getting at?" Dan demanded.

"You don't know Katie. Nothing floors her. Here are her best kitchen things smeared up so she can't use them, and what do you think she does? She puts them in the dishwasher, turns it on, and presto! Her stuff is like new."

"I better get me another beer," Dan said. "Are you finished yet?"

"No. Because when she goes to put the things back in the drawer that used to be lined with clean white paper, she sees it's smudged except where stuff was lying—it looks like a photographic negative. Where anything was in the drawer, it's still white—you can see the shape of a spoon or a fork on the blackened paper. Get it? The outline of every object is on it—a little hard to make out, but it's there."

"The fire!" Dan said. "Is that what you're leading up to?"

"Yeah. I thought of the bureau Ramsdell took from Cholly's room after the fire. The top drawer was stuck, remember? It was just a

hunch, Dan, but I went to the Ramsdell house. He was out working, but Mrs. Ramsdell's a nice woman—you ask her for something and she's glad to oblige."

"So you asked her to show you the bureau Ramsdell took from the fire. And?"

"It had three drawers, remember, and the top drawer that wouldn't open before? Only now it was dried out and slid out real easy—and there on the paper lining was the outline of the things that had been in it at the time of the fire. And the outline of the necklace couldn't have been clearer. Dan, that necklace was in Cholly's bureau drawer before the fire. Which means he stole it. And later on when he was at the fire, when he went inside the house as a member of the volunteer fire department, the first thing he did was look for that necklace."

"Which was in his room," Dan said, "where the fire never really got going. So he just grabbed the necklace and slammed the drawer shut without thinking of outlines on paper or anything else."

"And when Ramsdell called him and told him he could come and get his shirts," Dan continued, "Cholly saw that drawers two and three had the outlines of their contents, and knew that drawer number one must have the outline of the necklace. That's why he broke into the Ramsdell house. He wanted that paper drawer-liner."

"Which I now have," Willy said, "and which I showed to Cholly."

"And?"

"And he stopped laughing," Willy said contentedly.

Dan leaned back. "If Cholly had set that fire, he'd have taken the necklace first, so that lets him out. Larceny, yes, but he's clean on the arson job. What about Ramsdell?"

"A cheap little chiseler," Willy said. "I can't see him setting the fire. What for? If Cholly stole the necklace, then Ramsdell didn't, so he'd have no reason to burn down the house."

"Which leaves London," Dan said. "He's Livia's heir and he has the motive. He probably collects insurance on the house and on the necklace. Or at the very least, as her husband he gets his legal share of everything she owned." He sat up straight. "Give me a good night's sleep and I'll break him down. Give me two or three hours tomorrow morning and he'll be confessing the whole business."

But Dan was wrong. It took him a full five.

*He liked her to be there when he called . . .*

# TAKING CARE

by  
**CELIA DALE**



Every working day since his return from his honeymoon, Stanley Drew left the canteen as soon as he had finished his lunch, put on his raincoat, walked down the broad factory road to the wire gates, turned left to the telephone booth in the alley beyond the bus stop, and rang up his wife. Personal calls were not allowed on company lines.

"Hullo?" Her voice was very young.

"Is that you, dear? It's me. How are you?"



"I'm fine."

"Had your lunch, have you?"

"In a sec."

"What're you having?"

"Oh—cheese, beans . . . I haven't thought about it yet."

"Have more than a snack, dear."

"Yes, I will."

"What've you been doing?"

"I've made the kitchen curtains but I've run out of lace trim. I'll go out later and get some."

"Shall I bring you some home? I can get it easy."

"No thanks, Stan, I want them up by this evening. They'll look ever so pretty, with all those frills."

"You're a real little homemaker, pet."

"Well . . ."

"You're a real little wife too, d'you know that?"

She giggled. "I'd best get back to it then."

"Eat a proper lunch now. And then you'll go to the shops?"

"That's right."

"O.K. then, pet. Take care. I'm thinking of you."

And indeed he was, even as the months grew into a year or more. He could never lose the wonder, the nervous protective gratitude, that he, well into his forties after having cared for his invalid mother until her death, should have captured a girl as young and lovely as Cindy. She was not much more than half his age and had thick brown hair, eyelashes like a film star, and a figure to match. He'd thought her perfect when he first set eyes on her during a package tour to the Costa Brava. He was alone and she with two other girls, laughing and showing off in their bikinis. Some mornings she didn't appear till nearly midday, looking washed out and sad—the food apparently upset her. She'd soon perk up though; and when all three of them started to flirt with him, drawing him out of himself, it was she who stayed with him when the others ran off. She lay on the sand beside him with her eyes closed, her hair fanned out on a towel while he watched her out of the corner of his eye, suddenly ashamed of his own pale flesh and little paunch, his gnarled feet.

Nevertheless, she seemed to like him. The night before the holiday

ended he took her outside under the pine trees and kissed her. Her response drove him wild. He hardly saw the room she led him to or heard her assurances that the girls she shared it with were downstairs in the bar, hardly had a coherent thought in fact until he found himself back in his own room at past two o'clock in the morning, his holiday roommate solidly snoring.

He stayed close to her all the way back to London, carried her bags, and cherished her. In the airport bus he asked her to marry him and she said yes.

"Hullo?"

"Is that you, dear? It's me. Where were you? It rang ten times."

"I was in the toilet."

"I'm sorry, dear. Not an upset?"

"Of course not."

"How've you been?"

"I'm cleaning up the living room. All those old cycling magazines, d'you want them?"

"Well . . ."

"They're cluttering things up." She giggled. "And I can't see you on a cycle."

"Well, O.K., dear. Throw them out."

"O.K."

"Had your lunch yet?"

"In a sec."

"Have more than a snack, pet. An egg, milk . . ."

"I may do."

"You've got to take care, sweetheart."

Two months after their marriage she miscarried. The blood poured from her, more than he could believe possible at such an early stage, and he knew he would kill himself next day if they came to him in the hospital waiting room and told him she was dead. But they didn't. She recovered—wan and saying little—and beneath his anxiety, devotion, and relief ran a tiny flame of pride that at his age he had been so potent. They had married within a month of meeting so it must have happened at once, perhaps even on that dizzying night in Spain. It would happen again, he was sure, but not yet.

It took her a long time to be her old self again and, truth to tell, perhaps she never was, quite. More quiet, a little bit touchy, easily tired . . .

She was so young, they could afford to wait. Now he knew he could do it he was content to wait till she came around, and meanwhile he would cherish her, protect her, and swaddle her in his loving pride.

"Hullo?"

"Is that you, dear? It's me. Where were you?"

"When?"

"Ten minutes ago. It rang and rang."

"I was at the shops."

"At lunchtime?"

"Yes."

"You never go to the shops lunchtime."

"I ran out of milk."

"Didn't the milkman come by?"

"He was late."

"Ah. Well, I was worried."

"What about?"

"You not answering."

"For goodness sake, Stan . . ."

"I like to know where you are, dear. I get anxious."

"Don't be daft."

"I know where you are from the number of times it rings. Six times it's the kitchen. Eight times it's the living room. Ten times it's the bedroom or maybe the toilet."

"And twenty times I've fallen downstairs running to answer it and broken my bloody neck."

"Don't say that, pet. It's not funny."

"Honestly, Stan. I can't spend my life on the end of the phone."

"I like you to be there when I call, sweetheart, otherwise I worry. You're always there at lunchtime. I don't want you out when I ring, it upsets me."

She didn't reply.

"What have you been doing?" he asked placatingly.

"I told you. I went to the shops."

"But it's wash day, isn't it?"

"Yes, but the machine's on the blink. I haven't been able to do it all."

"I'll have a look at it when I get home. You take it easy, dear."

He was handy around the house, more house-proud than she was, once the novelty of having her own home had worn off. She had altered the place completely—gotten rid of everything his mother had liked and he had grown up with—repapered and repainted, doing much of the work herself. Perhaps that was why she had miscarried. On weekends he had helped her, doting and proud of her energy. He had loved to watch her small tight buttocks in her paint-stained jeans and her hair flopping into her eyes as she stretched for the ceiling, paint splashing over them both—she was very slapdash and he went around after her, cleaning up. When she lay exhausted, he would bring her tea, and as she lay back on the couch he would cook supper. He couldn't afford a new three-piece suite she wanted, but they'd chosen new stretch slipcovers together. The bedroom had been transformed into a lady's boudoir—all peach satin and nylon frills and fragrance from a dozen different bottles of lord-knew-what.

But all that was at first. Now things ran on an even keel, there was nothing much more to be done in the house except keep it clean and tidy. She didn't have a great deal to fill her time, which was why he liked to know where she was when he rang, to hear her voice and let her hear his, know he was thinking about her. And thinking about how a child would fill her time. She should surely be ready for one now . . .

It rang six times.

"Hullo?"

"Is that you, dear? It's me. Where were you?"

"In the kitchen."

"You're out of breath. What've you been doing?"

"I slipped on the mat when I was coming to the phone."

"Did you hurt yourself, pet?"

"No, I'm O.K. I just slipped." Her breath was more normal now.

"Well, take care, dear. What've you been doing?"

"Ironing, odds and ends. You know."

"Had your lunch yet?"

"Just going to. The toast's on, Stan, I don't want it to burn."

"Right, dear, you run off. Are you poaching yourself an egg with it?"

"Bye."

"Take care, dear . . ."

A child would fill her time, slow her down. Two years since they were married; over eighteen months since the miscarriage. Time enough. High time.

"Was that him?"

"Who else."

"Hop in."

"Mmm . . ."

"Christ, your feet are freezing!"

"What d'you expect, running downstairs? Warm them."

"Easy for you to say."

"I made it though. Six rings means I was in the kitchen."

"You mean he counts them?"

"Every one. Ten and I'm in the bedroom. And what'd I be doing here at 12:55 in the afternoon, I ask you?"

"I got the answer right here."

It rang thirteen times. She was very out of breath.

"Where were you?"

"Out in the garden."

"It's pouring down rain."

"A dog got in—a big black dog, like an Alsatian—it was digging up your dahlias. I ran out to chase it off."

"Be careful, dear, Alsations can be savage."

"I know. But he ran off."

"How've you been?"

"A bit stretched out. Last night upset me, Stan."

"I'm sorry, pet."

"No, it upset me. And I don't want to talk about it."

"Cindy . . ."

"I've got a headache, Stan, I'm going to lie down."

"You do that, sweetheart: take an aspirin. Shall I bring some home?"

But she had hung up.

He bought a dozen pink carnations from the man by the subway station and took them home to her. She still had a headache.

"Him?"

"Yes."

"Cuddle up. You're freezing."

"He's driving me nuts. He suffocates me. He's like some great smothering blanket. Every day the same thing. Morning— 'Bye-bye, dear, see you later, take care.' Dinner time— 'Is that you, dear? It's me, how've you been?' Evening— 'It's me, dear, I'm back; had a good day?' And later on— 'Are you sleepy, dear? How's your head?' It's not my bloody head he's worried about!"

"Ssh, chickykins, ssh . . ."

"Oh, Dave, if only you hadn't run out on me!"

"I couldn't help it, could I? I mean, I had to go where the money was, didn't I? I didn't know you was in the club, did I?"

"Would you have stayed if you had, Dave?"

"I dunno. T'be straight with you, I dunno. But now I would. Now I'd stay with you forever. Cindy, d'you believe me?"

"I don't know."

"You gotta believe me. I'm nuts about you, Cindy."

She answered at once. "Stan?"

"Hullo, dear. It's me."

"Stan, did you see my pills?"

"Pills?"

"Pills, my pills! The pills I take every morning. The pills so I won't get pregnant. *Those* pills!"

"I put them down the toilet, dear."

"You *what*?" It was almost a scream.

"You don't need them, pet. Not any more. They're not good for you to go on taking regularly. It's not natural."

He could sense her struggling for control; envisage her standing in their narrow hall, the receiver clenched in her hand. After a moment she said, "You know I'll get some more, don't you? I'll go to the doctor and get some more."

"I'd rather you didn't, dear. Anyway, visiting hours're not till this evening and the chemist'll be shut by then. You'll have to miss for a day or two."

She hung up. He wondered if he had done the right thing after all. Walking back to the factory, he decided he had . . .

"Dave, Dave, supposing I am?"

"You've got some now, haven't you?"

"But I was two days without!"

"It'd be mine, wouldn't it?"

"D'you think I'd let it be his? I can't bear him to touch me; I can't stand his great hands and his sippy eyes and his face and his voice and . . ."

The telephone rang.

"Don't answer it."

"I must."

"Why? Let him sweat."

"I have to, or else he keeps on and on . . ."

"Cindy . . ."

She ran out of the room, naked and crying.

It was a bad November, dank and sullen, often dark by midday with rain pouring down in sheets from heavy clouds. He finished his lunch in the canteen, put on his raincoat, took his umbrella and went out, down the broad factory road to the wire gates, turned left to the telephone booth he had used each working day since his honeymoon, in the alley beyond the bus stop.

The phone rang six times.

"Is that you, dear? It's me."

"Yes."

"Were you in the kitchen?"

"Yes."

"How've you been?"

"O.K."

"Had your lunch yet?"

"Soon."

"Don't just have a snack. Have something nourishing . . ."

The door of the booth was jerked open behind him and a heavy wrench crashed down on his head. He staggered, sagged, put up an arm. A cloth of some kind went over his head and the wrench crashed again, and again, and once more. His knees gave and he crumpled slowly down the walls of the booth, moved feebly, groaned, and died.

A hand in a rubber glove dropped the wrench beside him, then, after a moment, took up the receiver that spun on its plastic cord.

"Is that you? It's me." The voice was out of breath, taking great gulps of air.

She too was breathless. "Have you . . .?"

"Yes. I'll ring you. Don't go out."

"No."

"Stay by the phone. O.K.?"

"All right."

"Take care."

The door opened and shut quickly. The huddled shape with its muffled head was no more than a darker shadow on the floor as the rain beat heavily from the dark sky. The receiver had been replaced.

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*Cardula flies—sorry, spies—again . . .*

# CARDULA AND THE KLEPTOMANIAC

by  
Jack  
Ritchie



It was a beautiful evening—full moon, cloudless sky, and no headwinds. I would have preferred to fly, but my client, Diana Weatherly, insisted upon driving me in her car.

“What was the size of the stone?” I asked.

“About fifteen carats.”

“Valuable, of course?”

My dark-haired, violet-eyed client smiled. “Mr. Cardula, I don’t be-  
CARDULA AND THE KLEPTOMANIAC

lieve that it could be replaced for under fifty dollars."

I pondered the point. "A fifteen-carat diamond pendant worth only fifty dollars?"

She explained. "The stone wasn't a genuine diamond. It was glass, or paste, or plastic, or whatever they make those things out of these days."

"Hm," I said intelligently. "Then the stolen stone was only a *copy* of the original pendant?"

"It wasn't a copy of anything. It was an original in itself."

I nodded. "Now let me reprise. Last night someone crept into your bedroom while you were asleep and stole this pendant?"

"Yes. I was waiting there in the semi-darkness to see who would steal it, but somehow I simply conked off to sleep instead."

"So this was all in the nature of a trap? You deliberately placed the pendant in an obvious spot in your bedroom and then pretended to go to sleep? Unfortunately, your pretense turned into reality and you dozed off while the thief went about his work?"

She confirmed. "I just can't understand falling asleep like that. I mean, one would have thought that the excitement of the wait would have kept me awake and alert, but I believe I fell asleep almost as soon as my head hit the pillow. As a matter of fact, I slept until almost noon today and was still sleepy when I got up."

I rubbed my lean jaw. "It is my suspicion that you might have been drugged. Did you have a nightcap or something of that nature before you retired?"

"Well, it's a big weekend party and everybody drinks. I suppose anybody could have slipped something into one of my martinis."

"And this morning, when you discovered that your pendant was missing, you immediately raised the alarm?"

"Certainly not. We simply don't do things like that in my circle. Not for a piece of fake jewelry. The only people who know that the pendant is missing are me, the thief, and you."

"Is any one of your guests in financial trouble?"

"Not as far as I know. We're all rather well off."

"But one can never tell, can one? What I am getting at is that perhaps one of your guests, badly in need of money, hoped to realize a fortune by stealing and selling a stone which he assumed was worth thousands."

She shook her head. "Oh, no. That won't do as a motive here at all. You see, everybody—or at least the four specific persons with whom we are concerned—knew that the stone wasn't genuine because I told them so. The thief *never* would have stolen the pendant if he thought it was at all valuable."

I frowned at the atrocious green cufflinks I was wearing while I waited for clarification.

"The only respect in which I did lie," she said, "was to tell them that I regarded the pendant as a sort of good luck charm and was quite fond of it."

I drew my eyes away from the cufflinks. "Each of your guests—or at least a particular four—knew that the pendant was of no real monetary value and yet one of these four could not resist stealing it during the night? And further, you *expected* that the attempt would be made?"

She smiled sweetly. "I was not one hundred percent positive, but I did think there was a strong possibility."

My client had come to my office at a few minutes after nine this evening with the green cufflinks.

Now she said, "You see, one of those four I mentioned is a kleptomaniac. Or at least I think that he—or she—could be classified as such." She sighed. "It all started years and years ago. We grew up in the same neighborhood, went to the same schools, moved in the same social circles. We all live on Jefferson Point. You've heard of it, of course?"

Even I, a relative stranger to the area, had. Jefferson Point was an enclave of sorts, a colony of the wealthy beyond the suburbs of those who were simply well-to-do.

Diana took the freeway turnoff. "As I said, it began years and years ago. At parties and things like that. Quite often something would turn up missing—some little thing that was inexpensive, but personal. A comb, or a lipstick, a Mickey Mouse watch."

"These things were stolen just from you?"

"Oh, no. The thief played no favorites. He took from anybody."

"No one ever took the matter to the police?"

"Of course not. He—or she—never stole anything of real value. And actually, most of the time the victim assumed that he or she had simply misplaced or lost the article and that it would turn up after a while, but it never did." She was thoughtful. "The thief was very careful and

clever. Besides me, I don't think that there are more than two or three people in our circle who even suspect that there might be a kleptomaniac among us."

"It strikes me that stealing a pendant from your dresser during the night is not being very clever. Surely you would realize immediately that the object had been stolen, not misplaced."

"Yes, but the thief would count on me to suspect one of the servants. It is unthought of for any hostess on Jefferson Point to believe one of her guests capable of stealing a trinket."

"When did you first suspect that there was a kleptomaniac on Jefferson Point?"

"It was just after my blue rat-tail comb disappeared at the Emerson party two years ago. I was positive that I hadn't lost or misplaced it. Then I began to think about all of the other things that I and others had 'lost' during all those years, and it suddenly occurred to me that they might not have been lost at all."

"And so you began looking for the thief?"

"Yes. At first, of course, I had to deal with dozens and dozens of suspects. But then, by cross-checking who was at whose party when something disappeared, I eventually narrowed down my list to four people."

"Did you mention to anyone that you were looking for the thief?"

"Of course not. Word would eventually have gotten to him, and he might have stopped stealing altogether, and I was dreadfully curious about who he might be."

"But now you seem to have decided to give up detecting for yourself and you have hired me, a professional."

"Yes, Mr. Cardula. Last night I failed and I think that baiting another trap tonight and expecting results would be just too optimistic. I doubt very much if the thief would steal from me on consecutive nights. And besides, my four suspects all leave tomorrow morning for their various jobs and things and there's no telling when I might get them all under the same roof again. Albert's in the Army and his leave is ending, Imogene has those boutiques she's opened in Chicago to keep her busy, Herbert has his medical practice, and Agnes spends most of her time following the sun." She took her eyes off the road for a moment to look at me. "That's where you and the cufflinks come in."

In my office she had presented me with the cufflinks. They were the

most garish and obviously inexpensive set I had ever worn—or seen, for that matter. But they were, I will admit, attention getting.

“Do you think that your kleptomaniac will steal from a total stranger?”

“I don’t see why not. He seems to have been completely indiscriminate in his victims.”

I watched her. “Last night, if you had not fallen asleep and you had caught your kleptomaniac in the act, what would you have done?”

Her eyes flickered for a moment. “Why absolutely nothing. I would just have let him—or her—take the pendant while I pretended to be asleep. It is just to satisfy my curiosity that I want to find out who he is.”

“And what am I expected to do when I see who the culprit is? Shall I pounce upon him?”

“Nothing of the sort,” she said firmly. “Let him steal the damn cufflinks. I just want you to identify him to me immediately.”

We drove along winding tree-lined blacktop until Diana finally turned into one of the estate lanes. She followed it and stopped before a large and well-lighted mansion. I gazed dubiously at the dozen or so cars parked in the driveway. “Just how many weekend guests do you have?”

“Twenty-three. However, we are concerned with only four of them. I wanted the thief to feel safe, secure, and daring in a herd, so to speak.”

We got out of the car. “This is my parents’ home,” she said. “But they’re in Europe at the moment and this is my bash. I doubt very much if anybody’s missed me.”

She stopped for a moment and then said, “Ah, what luck. Here are two of our suspects now. Albert and Imogene.”

She led me to the side terrace and introduced me as a friend from Europe.

Albert Spurrier wore an immaculate Army uniform with a major’s gold oak leaves. There were rows of ribbons and awards running across the left side of his jacket. He was perhaps six feet tall and could have been described as ruddy, one of my favorite colors.

“Albert used to be a Boy Scout,” Diana said. “He earned every single award and badge they had to offer.”

Albert nodded happily. "Only been done once before, you know. And I still am a scout, Diana. The leader of Troop 196 at the post."

"As you can see," Diana said, "Albert is quite a brave man. He has any number of combat awards."

Albert sighed. "That's the one part of the Army I dislike."

Diana smiled. "Albert is basically a pacifist."

He agreed. "Almost, Diana. I hate war, but I was drafted, faced up to my duty to my country, and went off as a private. Then I discovered that I liked the Army. Not war, mind you, but the regular routine of peacetime Army life that drives most other men out of their minds. So I managed to get an appointment to West Point and here I am today." He shook his head sadly. "War itself is so disorderly. Smashing things. It revolts the architectural and human ecologist in me. But the peacetime Army is quite another thing. To be frank about it, I love accumulating awards and badges and ribbons, though not combat stars. Or wounds, for that matter." He indicated a number of items on his chest. "I'm a qualified parachutist, shoot expertly with any weapon, and have just completed a ranger course. In September I'm off to helicopter school. They give the neatest badges. Real collector's items."

Imogene McCarthy had been listening patiently. She had auburn hair and was rather tall. She regarded me with some interest. "You have the most charming accent."

I bristled slightly. "Madam, I am positive that I do *not* have an accent."

"Well, you *look* as though you have an accent."

"Imogene collects elephants," Diana said. "Not the real live ones, of course. Those little china and plastic and glass ones."

"China only, dear," Imogene corrected. "That puts a sensible boundary on the whole damn project."

"Imogene has a whole room at home devoted to shelves of china elephants," Albert said.

Imogene smiled patiently. "I started collecting when I was twelve. After two years, I'd completely lost interest in them, but by then it was too late. I already had two hundred elephants and had established a reputation. People still keep sending me elephants whenever they travel. From Bangladesh, Madagascar, Monaco. I personally haven't collected any of the creatures since my fourteenth birthday—in fact,

I haven't been in that room for ten years. But my parents tell me I am now the proud owner of almost a thousand china elephants and the end is still not in sight."

Diana Weatherly now directed our attention to the cufflinks I was wearing. "Why, Mr. Cardula, I hadn't noticed those cufflinks before. How very extraordinary and rococo. I suppose they are ancient and priceless heirlooms?"

I regarded the horrible things with heroic fondness. "Why, no. As a matter of fact they are just green glass. However, I do treasure them for other reasons. They were given to me by an old gypsy woman with the exhortation that if I wore them, they would ward off evil. She added that once a month would be quite sufficient."

Since I do not drink—certainly not alcohol—and thus could not be drugged, I thought I would add something of my own to our trap. I politely covered a yawn. "I have just finished a tedious bit of traveling. I'll probably sleep like a log tonight. And once I get to sleep, nothing short of a cannon can wake me."

Diana began the process of moving me away. "I've got to introduce Mr. Cardula to a few other people. I hope the two of you are finding something to talk about?"

Albert nodded. "Actually, Imogene and I haven't seen each other since Roger's funeral."

Diana took my arm and we moved away. "Imogene was my dearest friend in school. But I must add that when I was about thirteen, I lost a little bracelet that had four tiny little elephants dangling from it."

We entered the house and she indicated a tall dark man with a Mephistophelian beard at the other end of the room. "Dr. Herbert P. Jonas."

"And what does he collect?" I asked.

"Heartbeats," Diana said.

We edged through the guests until we reached the doctor.

"I was just telling Mr. Cardula about your record collection, Herb," Diana said and turned back to me. "Herb collects heartbeats. On tape, wire, records, and so forth. He has healthy heartbeats, morbid heartbeats, and sad heartbeats, happy heartbeats. You name a heart disease and he'll have a record of that one pounding away—ordinary hearts, extraordinary hearts, hearts of the famous. He has the heartbeat of Calvin Coolidge."

Dr. Jonas shrugged. "Actually, the sound quality is terrible. But the record has been certified as authentic." He studied me. "I am always on the lookout for unusual heartbeats. You wouldn't by any chance be a collector's item?"

"No," I said firmly. "My heart is quite normal. I'll stake my life on that." I winced slightly.

Diana discovered my cufflinks and bubbled, "I've been wanting to comment on what striking cufflinks you have, Mr. Cardula. A family heirloom, perhaps? Quite valuable, I suppose?"

I went through my routine for the benefit of Dr. Jonas, our third suspect.

Diana's eyes flitted about the room and finally settled upon another individual. "There's Agnes. I've simply got to have you meet her."

We left Dr. Jonas and threaded our way toward Agnes.

"Agnes has just gotten rid of her fourth husband. Three of the collection were tennis pros. I think she's gone back to her maiden name, which is Williams."

Agnes Williams was a striking blonde with no disappointing proportions and one had the feeling that she was tanned from crown to toe, without interruptions. She appeared to be in deep conversation with a tall young man, also thoroughly tanned, whose first name proved to be Cedric.

Diana introduced us and after we successfully passed through our cufflink routine she said, "How is your tennis, Agnes?"

Agnes laughed lightly. "I've given it up. It just isn't my game." She shook her head sadly. "You know, Diana, times have changed so dreadfully that two of my ex-husbands are collecting alimony from *me*. They convinced the judge that they had the right to be maintained in the style of life to which I had accustomed them."

A small happy smile crept into Cedric's face.

Diana regarded Cedric. "Cedric doesn't play tennis?"

"Absolutely not," Agnes said. "He has no use for the game. He's the golf pro over at the Nagawanah Country Club."

Agnes turned her critical attention to me. "You should get out in the sun more, Mr. Cardula. Get yourself a healthy tan."

"No," I said. "I am allergic."

She nodded sympathetically. "Why not try a sun lamp instead?"

"I have trepidations concerning sun lamps. I do not know if the



beam of a sun lamp carries exactly the same properties as that of the sun itself. Suppose I turned on the switch and . . ." I sighed. "I simply cannot afford to experiment. One mistake and it is my last."

When Diana and I were alone again, she said, "Well, there's your cast of suspects. I don't suppose you know which one of them is our kleptomaniac yet?"

"I rather suspect that I do. Though, of course, I may be mistaken."

Her eyes clouded in thought. "Was it something one of them said?"

"No, it was something you said. Tell me, at what time yesterday evening did you begin showing off the pendant and conveying your information concerning it?"

"At around ten. I wanted to make sure that all four of my suspects were coming before I set my trap and Imogene didn't get here until nearly that time."

There was a short silence and then she said, "Well, which one of them is the kleptomaniac?"

I smiled sparingly. "I cannot jeopardize the name of someone who may in fact prove to be innocent. We will set our little trap tonight and see if I am correct." I paused a moment. "Who was Roger?"

Her face seemed to freeze for a moment. "He was my brother."

"And he died?"

"Yes."

"An accident?"

"No." And it was obvious that she was not prepared to talk further on the subject. "Your room is on the second floor on the right at the end of the corridor."

I nodded. "And your suite?"

"Why do you need to know that?"

"Madam," I said, "when I discover who our kleptomaniac is, I intend to tell you immediately. I am not remaining for breakfast."

"My door is farther down the corridor on the right-hand side next to the bust of Edgar Allan Poe," Diana said.

She left me to circulate among her guests and I edged my way back to Imogene McCarthy, the collector of elephants. When we were within speaking distance, I said, "Several people here have made reference to Roger's funeral. Roger was Diana's brother, wasn't he?"

Imogene nodded. "Yes. He was about a year older than she. They

were inseparable. Roger was great fun, though he did tend to drink a little too much."

"It was a pity how he died," I said cleverly.

She agreed. "Yes."

There was a silence. I cleared my throat. "I've heard conflicting stories."

She seemed surprised. "What's to conflict?"

There was a longer silence while she measured me. Then she smiled. "You haven't heard any conflicting stories at all, have you? As a matter of fact, you really don't know anything at all about Roger's death. You're just nosy and want to find out."

I found myself blushing, which is quite a strain.

She waved a hand. "Nosiness is nothing to be ashamed of. How else can we learn anything if we're not nosy? Roger was murdered. Somebody hit him over the head with one of my iron elephants."

Dutifully I said, "Iron elephants?"

"Yes. Just about two years ago, at my place. It's down the road about a mile." She took a drink from a passing servant's tray. "We had a weekend something like this one, with lots of guests."

She sipped the drink. "Well, came morning, Roger was found dead in his pajamas on the floor of his bedroom. He'd been struck over the head, as I say, with one of my iron elephants."

"But I thought you collected only china . . ."

"I try to. But some people just can't get that distinction through their heads, so they send me other kinds too. Those damn plastic ones, or lead, or aluminum, or iron, or whatever. Well, I can't just toss them away. People would eventually learn about it and their feelings would be hurt. So Mother stores most of my non-china elephants in boxes, but she also distributes a few around the house as knickknacks. And there was an iron elephant on Roger's dresser—"

"But who killed him?"

"Nobody knows to this day. The police came and questioned everyone and took fingerprints. It was exciting, but they couldn't pin it on anyone. So they settled for the old intruder theory, because the French windows to the balcony were open."

She finished her drink. "You know the way it goes. The thief breaks into Roger's room. Roger wakes. The burglar panics and smashes Roger over the head with the nearest thing available."

"Was anything missing?"

"Roger's wallet was still on the dresser and it had about two hundred dollars in it, according to the police. They think that Roger woke before the burglar got to the wallet. And after killing Roger the intruder had nothing but escape on his mind."

"Are you satisfied with that theory?"

"Personally, I think that one of the guests did it, but I haven't the faintest suspicion who."

"Roger's sister was one of your guests?"

"Yes, poor dear. Of course it quite devastated her."

I casually exhibited my cufflinks again and stifled another yawn. "I hope it isn't impolite to leave the party, but I simply must go to my room and get some sleep. I'm dead tired. Once my head hits the pillow I sleep like a log."

"I know," Imogene said.

I made my way to the second floor and stopped at the door of Diana's suite. I tried the doorknob and the door opened. I stepped inside. In the moonlight, I studied the room. There was the bed in which Diana must have been lying last night, and the dresser on which she had put the bait, her pendant.

She had intended to feign sleep and see who came to steal the pendant. She was going to do nothing to thwart or expose the thief. She just wanted to satisfy her curiosity.

Frankly, I didn't believe a word of it.

I moved to the night stand on the right side of the bed and pulled open the top drawer.

Ah, yes.

I picked up and examined the revolver. It was a .48 Magnum, a weapon whose slug is touted as capable of destroying the engine block of an automobile.

I put the gun back into the drawer and left the room. I found my own bedroom and entered.

Should I read for a while? It could be hours before the guests settled in their rooms for the night. Probably my suspect would wait until two or three in the morning—an hour when he felt that everyone would be asleep—before he set about the task of stealing my cufflinks. On the other hand, he might be bolder and simply steal away from the party.

now and risk entering my bedroom. After all, I had quite thoroughly established that once I got to sleep it was impossible to wake me.

I really couldn't take any chances. I unsnapped my cufflinks and put them on the dresser. Then I took off my shoes and lay down on the bed, pulling the covers up to my chin.

Frankly, I should have read. It was hours before I heard the last guests finding their rooms and settling down for the night.

I continued to wait, frequently consulting my digital watch, and began to have doubts that my bait was to be taken.

Three A.M. passed. I most certainly would have to leave before four if I wanted to arrive home before sunrise.

My hearing is abnormally acute and so I caught the faint click of a door being opened somewhere down the hall. I waited, and soon distinguished the brush of shoes or slippers on the hall runner. The sounds came closer, then stopped just outside my door.

The moonlight provided sufficient light so that I could see the doorknob slowly turn. I closed my eyes to slits, and watched the door being pushed silently open. A dark figure appeared in the doorway and stood obviously listening.

I decided to breathe rather heavily. That would have to be sufficient. I refused to stoop to the indignity of a snore.

After a few more moments, my intruder appeared to be satisfied. The figure moved quickly to the dresser, scooped up the cufflinks, and darted out of the room. It was all over within a matter of seconds, during which time, however, I was clearly able to establish the identity of the kleptomaniac.

When the intruder was gone, I waited a few minutes and then put on my shoes. I went out to the small balcony outside my windows and circled the house.

Only two windows on the second floor of the wing were lighted. In one of the rooms I saw the kleptomaniac, eyes gleaming, examining the cufflinks.

And in the other, Diana sat in her bed reading a book and glancing impatiently at her watch, obviously waiting for news concerning our kleptomaniac.

I tapped on the French windows.

She was startled, but when she saw it was me, she rose and un-

locked them. She stared past me and frowned. "How did you get here? This balcony doesn't connect to yours."

"Never mind that," I said. "Suffice it to say that I am here."

She brightened immediately. "The trap worked? You know who the kleptomaniac is?"

I rubbed my jaw—happily noting the absence of the cufflinks. "Madam, why do you keep that revolver in your night stand?"

Her eyes went to the object of furniture in question. "How did you . . ." Then she shrugged. "For protection, of course." —

"You purchased the weapon yourself?"

She shrugged again. "Yes."

I smiled. "No, Madam, it is extremely doubtful that you bought that revolver yourself for yourself. Not a .48 Magnum. Women tend toward the traditional .22. Or possibly, in our liberated age, the bold .32. But a .48 Magnum? Never. Even if you went to a gun store fully primed to buy a .48 Magnum, any clerk worth his salt would succeed in directing you to a smaller caliber."

"So I didn't buy it myself," she said. "It used to belong to Roger. What difference does it make?"

"Madam, I was merely pursuing the point that if one lies about one thing one is likely to lie about others. Therefore, I submit that last night when you baited your trap it was not with the innocent intention of merely satisfying your curiosity as to the identity of the kleptomaniac. When the thief picked up that pendant, you premeditatively intended to blast his engine block . . ." I regrouped. "You intended to blast the vitals from his body."

"Ridiculous," she said, avoiding my eyes. "Now who is the klepto?"

I continued. "And why would you want to destroy a relatively harmless kleptomaniac?" I permitted myself another small smile. "Because he is not a relatively harmless kleptomaniac. This individual has done something to you—or yours—which you feel merits his murder."

I regarded her penetratingly. "And this brings to mind the death of your brother. It is my deduction that you suspect that the killer of your brother is also the neighborhood kleptomaniac. There was something about Roger's death that convinced you."

She was silent for thirty seconds and then decided to talk. "The ring. Roger's missing ring. He wore two rings. One of them was obviously worth thousands of dollars. The thief did not take it. The other was a

class ring, just a silver ring with Roger's initials and the date his class graduated, 1971. I don't believe it was worth more than thirty dollars. But the thief took that." Her eyes met mine fiercely. "Don't you see? That night two years ago Roger had quite a bit to drink and the kleptomaniac counted upon Roger being in a deep sleep. But as he was removing the ring from Roger's finger, Roger woke up and recognized him. Or her. The kleptomaniac killed him rather than being unveiled to the world."

"Why didn't you tell the police about the missing ring?"

"Because at the time I didn't realize it was gone. I mean, just seeing his body like that blotted out everything else. It wasn't until weeks after his funeral that I realized the ring had been missing."

"But you still didn't go to the police with the information?"

"Frankly, by that time I had lost all confidence in the police. It seemed to me that the only way the killer would ever be uncovered was to find the kleptomaniac. But if they bungled that job too, they might frighten him into never stealing again and my last hope of catching him would disappear. No. I wanted him to think that he had gotten away with murder and keep stealing again and again until I finally tracked him down."

"Diana," I said, "has it ever occurred to you that the kleptomaniac and the murderer might not be one and the same person?"

"But the missing ring . . ."

I held up a hand. "The kleptomaniac might have stolen the ring while Roger was still alive and sleeping. And later, someone else—another guest or possibly even this suspected intruder—could have entered the room and killed Roger for another reason. Or possibly the killing was done first, and when the kleptomaniac entered the room on his own mission he was not deterred by the fact that Roger was dead."

She shook her head. "Something like that would be just too much of a coincidence. I mean murder and kleptomania to the same man the same night."

I offered another possibility. "Suppose that after murdering Roger, the killer decided to put the blame on the kleptomaniac by also stealing Roger's ring. Unfortunately for him, nobody noticed that the ring was missing."

Diana dissented again. "But if the killer went to the trouble of stealing the ring and nobody noticed it was missing, wouldn't he somehow

call attention to the fact himself? Wouldn't he casually clear his throat and say something like 'By Jove, isn't Roger's class ring missing?' But no one did." She folded her arms. "All right, now who is our kleptomaniac killer?"

I hesitated. "You still have no intention of taking the matter to the police?"

"With no tangible evidence that the kleptomaniac and the killer are the same? No, the only solution—the only justice—is for me to kill the killer myself."

"Diana, do you realize that if you do kill Roger's murderer you will undoubtedly go to prison for a long, long time?"

She squared her shoulders. "I don't care. Who is the kleptomaniac?"

I shook my head. "I haven't the slightest intention of telling you. Firstly, because I do not want to see you go to prison, and secondly because the police might construe that I am an accessory to murder by providing the name of the victim."

She became demanding. "I'll give you ten thousand dollars for his name."

"No."

"Twenty thousand."

"No."

Eventually she reached the "I'll give you a blank check" stage, but I remained adamant.

She took a deep breath. "Very well. But you aren't the only private detective in the world. I'll hire another—as many as I need—until I find out who killed Roger."

I glanced at my watch. It was that time again. "I'm afraid I must bid you an immediate goodnight."

I left her in her room and walked down the corridor until I found the free night air and headed for home.

The next evening, when I rose, I shaved, showered, and proceeded to my office. I consulted the telephone book for the home address of my killer/kleptomaniac and wrote it in my notebook.

I waited until ten o'clock and then took off for Jefferson Point. Since I was not familiar with the region or its winding roads, I was forced to descend a number of times to consult directional signs and numbers before I finally found the house for which I was searching.

I circumnavigated the building until I found lights in a second-floor bedroom. Inside, my kleptomaniac was in the process of unlocking a large suitcase on the bed. The lid sprang open.

I blinked.

The suitcase was filled to overflowing with bracelets, rings, combs, necklaces, baubles, and gewgaws of every sort. Evidently I had arrived at that hour of the evening when he gloated over the spoils.

I turned the knob of the French window and stepped softly into the room. I moved toward the killer, who remained completely unaware of my presence.

What motivated the kleptomania I could not guess—I am not a psychiatrist—but I did know that the future portended that Diana would eventually track down her brother's killer and in turn become a murderess and be sent to prison.

Hardly a proper ending for this case.

Yet Diana was quite right. Justice must be done, though it must be done with more expertise and anonymity.

I reached forward and tapped Dr. Herbert P. Jonas on the shoulder. He leaped into the air and when his feet touched the rug again, he was facing me, his eyes wide and wild.

I indicated the collection and clucked my tongue. "So *you* are the Jefferson Point kleptomaniac."

He stared at me. "Who the devil are you and how did you get in here?" And then he recognized me.

I nodded. "I am Cardula. Licensed and bonded private detective." I indicated the array again. "It is my duty to expose you to the world."

He ran his tongue over his lips. "Now just one moment, Mr. Cardula. Couldn't we come to some . . ."

I stayed his words. "No, Dr. Jonas. I am impossible to bribe into silence." I went to his bedside phone and picked it up. This put my back to him, though I did still have a fair view of him through the dresser mirror. I began dialing at random.

What would he do now? I wondered. I stopped dialing and pretended to be waiting for the connection to be made. Jonas's eyes darted madly about the room and then decided upon a heavy glass ashtray. He picked it up and advanced behind me, arms upraised.

Ah, I thought with some satisfaction, I had not said that I would expose him as a murderer. Merely a kleptomaniac. But he considered



that quite a sufficient reason to kill me—just as, it was now obvious, he had killed Roger Weatherly.

I turned quickly, dropped the phone, and swiftly and efficiently snapped his neck.

A certain basic logic had led me to suspect him from the beginning. On the night her pendant had been stolen Diana had obviously been drugged. After all, one simply does not drop off to innocent sleep when one is waiting to kill someone.

And does your average soldier, or elephant-, or husband-collector carry about on his person for instant use knockout drops or sleeping powders? If lengthy premeditation to steal were involved, perhaps yes. However, none of the suspects even knew of the existence of Diana's pendant until ten o'clock that night.

And so that left Dr. Jonas, who, like all physicians, was never far from his little black bag and its contents. Probably he had kept it in his car. And once determined to steal the pendant, he had simply gone outside, fetched the amount of sleeping potion he needed, and slipped it into one of Diana's drinks.

I poured the contents of the suitcase out upon the bed. Yes, there were my cufflinks, hideously obvious even in that melange. I rummaged through the collection until I found a silver ring bearing the initials R.W. and the date 1971. I sighed and put it back.

I carried the body of the now defunct Dr. Jonas out to the balcony and dropped it to the driveway below.

When daylight came, he would be discovered and the police would be called. They would investigate and come upon the bed strewn with its trinkets, the bizarreness of which would certainly get Jonas's demise a prominent place in the newspapers. The identification of various objects long thought lost by the residents of Jefferson Point would follow and the neighborhood kleptomaniac would finally be unmasked.

And the police? They would eventually assume that Dr. Jonas had gone out onto the balcony for a breath of fresh air or to admire the moonlight and that somehow he had tripped over the low railing and snapped his neck on the driveway below.

I stood on the balcony, looking down at the body.

What blood type was he, I wondered? A pos? A neg? B pos? The hell with it. I wouldn't touch him again with a ten-foot pole.

I flew back to my office.

*It was a grand and beautiful gift . . .*

# IRISH MIST

by JEAN L. BACKUS



Early on a Saturday morning in June when the witching light was on the land, Sarah Mary Costigan set a chair in the grass outside her front door and took up her knitting. Towering clouds blowing in from the sea sent shadows scudding over the grape-blue mountain behind her cottage and changed the fields from plum to leaf green and back to plum again. On the point below the road, white waves lashed at the black rocks while far out toward the islands a fisherman sat dark and

motionless in his small round currach, reminding her of Paddy Pat who had been dead for forty years.

Sarah Mary sighed over the old hurt and clicked her needles, in a hurry to finish the sweater for Con Connors who would come on Monday and pay her six pounds for it, although she'd heard that when he delivered her sweater to the store at the airport down by the River Shannon he collected sixteen. A sharp man, Con, but she managed on what he paid her. Besides, her son Tommy, living in California, sent her fifty American dollars each Christmas, which helped, what with the price of everything climbing faster than the roses over the window. Still, the day her eyes gave out and she had to depend on Tommy to keep her would be a day without joy to be put off as long as possible, good luck, amen.

Sarah Mary glanced with malice at her neighbor's cottage, standing between hers and the village a mile to the east. Now Eileen O'Noon lived there with her husband, a bold girl like her mother Megan had been, and the cause of sending Tommy away to America when he was sixteen. At a cost in sorrow to be sure, which Sarah Mary had been paying for twenty-five years and would go on paying until she died. Just to think she'd never seen her six granddaughters and wee Danny, her grandson.

But Sarah Mary brightened with anticipation and she bent furiously to her needles because Danny was coming to visit soon and she had things to do before Danny arrived. The truckle bed stored in the byre had to be brought out and all the linen had to be washed. But first, the sweater must be finished for Con Connors. She'd be one short next month, she'd tell him, wanting to save the time for Danny.

Presently when the light went and it began to rain, Sarah Mary went inside to make tea and butter a piece of bread before taking up her work again. Another few hours and she'd be ready to join knitted front to back and sleeves to body, them being all finished and waiting in the cupboard. And another thing, she must get out the sweater she'd knitted for Paddy Pat and wash it as a gift for Danny. A shame Paddy Pat would never see their grandson, sinner though he'd been, him and that Megan.

Even as the thought burdened Sarah Mary's mind with remembered pain, Eileen O'Noon knocked at the door.

"The postman said you had a letter from California," Eileen began.

"From Tommy, was it? I'm perishing to know what it says."

"From Danny," Sarah Mary told her tightly. "I'm not sociable at all today, Eileen, what with Con due on Monday and wee Danny coming to visit any time soon."

"Danny coming, is it?" Eileen stood cool as sheets on a hot summer night, not turning away at all. "Is Tommy bringing him? It would be fine to see Tommy again. What a joyous good time he and I had growing up-together, all thanks to you, Sarah Mary."

"It was Christian duty, taking an orphan in." Sarah Mary hiked a shoulder for the guilt Eileen's words raised in her. "But Danny's coming alone. As soon as his school is out is what he wrote in his letter."

"Ah, the pity of it." Eileen's voice was sly as she leaned against the door in her man's sweater and the trousers she called slacks and Sarah Mary thought were an insult to womanhood. Then she swung her red hair back from her face exactly as Megan used to do. "I'll have to tell him all about how it was with his father and me when we were young."

The saints save us, Sarah Mary thought—Danny with no experience of women and Eileen the jezebel. It was a pity O'Noon ever married her and came to live with her in the cottage that had been her mother's. "Go away," Sarah Mary said. "You're making me drop stitches." She added "God bless," not meaning it at all, and after Eileen left she knitted more furiously than before.

Late in the evening, the sweater finished, Sarah Mary washed at the sink and took herself to bed. But she was long in falling asleep, and when she did she dreamed an old dream of Paddy Pat, all dripping in the sea and looking at her as if she were a cow plop. She heard him whisper "Megan" just before he went under the kelp and never rose again.

She woke up weeping and tossed and turned until it was time to dress for church. Then she walked into the village and at early Mass joined men in their Sunday suits and women with black shawls like her own over their heads, and the wee ones squirming and wriggling to get out into the glorious fine day. After communion, she spoke quickly to Father Shanahan who had heard her confession and comforted her all those years ago and in between, then she walked straight home. By bedtime, she had washed the smell of mothballs from Paddy Pat's sweater, and the windows were all sparkling, the slate floor scrubbed.

She was so weary she slept without dreaming.

On Monday before noon, when Con had been and gone, Sarah Mary took the money he'd given her and went again into the village, coming home with a chicken and vegetables. By then the day was gone. So it would be tomorrow for getting the truckle bed ready and all the rest she had to do.

But Danny arrived that night when she was asleep, riding up on a thundering motorbike and beating so hard on her door that Sarah Mary was afraid to open it and shouted for him to go away and leave a poor old woman in peace.

"Gran! Open up, Gran, it's Danny! It's me!"

She could hardly believe it, but there he stood in the doorway, a towering man with a thick beard. He wore a leather jerkin with fringe on it and, the saints preserve us, a string of beads instead of a rosary around his neck, and spotted velvet pants, and his bare feet in open sandals. A shameful sight, except that he was her grandson.

He entered in a rush and swung her off her feet in a hug that hurt her ribs and set her heart to shaking like a tinker's tambourine.

"Whisht, put me down, you spalpeen, scaring the wits out of an old woman already looking at her grave." Past joy at his arrival, she could hardly get her breath. "Let me go for my shawl. 'Tisn't decent, me in my nightgown and all."

"You look good to me," he said, holding her off. "Gran, do you realize I'm really here?"

"No!" she said, mocking because she wanted to cry. "Sure and it's Daniel Patrick Costigan himself, is it? And him such a huge big thing."

Danny laughed magnificently, showing white teeth through his beard. "Yeah, it's me. I'm sorry to be so late but I had to rent the cycle and I've ridden all the way from Shannon. Oh, but Ireland's beautiful, Gran, so green and so beautiful."

"Well, why wouldn't it be? Didn't God bless it and send his saints to make it fit for the living?"

Sarah Mary wiped her eyes and went to get her shawl and twist her hair up at the back of her neck. Then she swung the kettle over the coals and put a block of turf under while Danny watched and sniffed.

"Yech, what a stink," he said. "Honest-to-goodness peat. Isn't that something?"

"Of course it's peat," Sarah Mary said, loving the sweet grace of

him. "What else would I be burning at all?"

"The way you talk kills me," Danny said, laughing, but not to hurt her feelings. He looked around at the stone hearth with the pot oven beside, at the mantel with its load of family photographs Tommy had sent, at the scarred oak table Paddy Pat had bought forty years ago.

They sat and ate bread and butter and drank strong hot tea, then finally Danny sat back and, taking a pouch from his pocket, rolled a smoke which smelled so strong that Sarah Mary went all dizzy and had to work to take in the messages he was giving her from his father and his sisters....

"Great big girls they are, Gran. Kathleen is nineteen and the others a year apart. Nora's thirteen already. You'd love them. And they'd love you."

"Sure and why wouldn't we love each other?" Sarah Mary said. "Now tell me about Tommy. Himself never says much when he writes, and that's only at Christmas."

"Oh, Dad's O.K. He's still selling cars, though it's a tough market with the energy crisis." He yawned widely and scratched his beard. "I'm bushed, Gran. Can we talk in the morning?"

"Why not? Come along to the byre and we'll get your bed—"

"Who needs a bed? I carry everything I need with me." He went out to the motorbike and returned with a fine soft sleeping bag to put on the floor by the hearth, and a kit of toilet articles, and a pan and knife and spoon. "It's not too classy, but it's cheap," he said. "I'm here on my own money, Gran, and after a day or two with you I'm going to camp all around Ireland, and maybe go over to England too."

"I thought you'd be after staying the summer," Sarah Mary said, ready to cry except he was so brave and independent, traveling alone like that.

"My plane ticket is only good for fifteen days," Danny told her. "Is this the bathroom?"

Sarah Mary stopped him at her bedroom door and took him to the room at the back where the toilet was.

"What do you know?" he exclaimed. "No tub, no shower?"

"Sure and what's wrong with the sink?" But Sarah Mary was embarrassed, thinking of his home against hers.

"I'm sorry, Gran, I didn't mean to be rude. I've washed in a sink before. Don't wait up for me."

She lay awake listening to him in the next room. Daniel Patrick Cos-tigan. Twenty years old and nothing wee about him at all.

Danny was up before she was next morning, knocking on her door to ask where she kept the food. Sarah Mary directed him to the larder and dressed without a wash. When she went out, he'd put away his bed and had the kettle boiling, and bacon and eggs frying in the three-legged spider on the hearth.

"I hope you don't mind," he said. "I'm used to doing for myself."

"Danny, my lad, it's so sweet to have you here it's whatever you're wanting I'm wanting too. After breakfast, if you've a mind for fishing, Paddy Pat's old currach is stored in the byre. We can see that it's safe for human use and then go out together for mackerel if there is any."

"Maybe another time, Gran. I want to take the machine and go up to Donegal if it isn't too far."

"Ah, Danny, you'll be gone the whole day?"

For a second, he looked uncomfortable, then he brightened. "Hey, why don't you come along? You can sit behind and hang onto me."

"And wouldn't that be a pretty sight." Sarah Mary shook her head, all the time dying to go with him. "I've work to do, a new sweater to start . . . Oh, that makes me think. Sit right there now. Don't move. I have a wee present for you."

She hurried to her room and took up Paddy Pat's sweater. Just for a second, she held it close to her cheek and then she went out to Danny. "Put it on, lad, and see if it fits. It was your grandda's."

"Hey, it's beautiful, Gran!" Right before her eyes Danny took off his jerkin and, for mercy's sake, he wore no undervest on his hairy upper. But when he put the sweater on, it sat prettily on his shoulders. "Did you make it?"

"And who else would be knitting for Paddy Pat?"

Pleased and proud, she told him over breakfast how she knitted four sweaters a month in summer when the light lasted, but only three in winter. And how no fisherman along the coast ever learned to swim because it made the drowning death slower, so their wives created distinctive patterns for each, to identify a man when a body was found.

"The cables represent the ropes to hold a small boat against the sea," she said, "and these are lobster claws. And the honeycomb is for sweetening. The trellis imitates stone walls across the fields. And up

the center—”

But she'd never told anyone, not even Paddy Pat, that the center panel recorded how she'd been working in Dublin forty years ago when Paddy Pat advertised for a wife. They had met and married all in a day, and soon after, when Sarah Mary had learned to love her husband, the widow Megan came to live next door and took Paddy Pat away . . .

“What's wrong, Gran?”

“Nothing.” She made a smile over the jealousy that still rankled, although Father Shanahan kept saying she must put it out of her heart. “Wear it in health and joy, Danny.”

He came to hug her, and before God it looked like tears in his eyes. “It's a grand and beautiful gift, Gran. I'll wear it in love for you and Grandda.”

They went out into the soft wet light coming off the water, with rain clouds rising all around, and she stood watching as he kicked the motorbike into a roar.

“So long, Gran, see you tonight.”

“God bless,” she said. “When you come home, it's a feast I'll have ready for you.”

He turned into the road, and Sarah Mary was about to go inside when she saw Eileen O'Noon come out and hail Danny as he neared her gate. Oh, the saints have mercy, twenty-five years older than he was and as shameless as her mother had been. Who knew what lies the wicked girl would tell?

Sarah Mary crossed herself and began to run. But before she reached the road, Eileen had swung her legs over the back of the bike and put her arms around Danny's waist and the two of them were off.

A sight to ruin the day. Sarah Mary went back, heavy with foreboding, and stripped to wash before she got out her needles and a new skein of wool, oily and odorous in her hands. She'd have four sweaters for Con this month after all.

At twilight, she had a sleeve finished and she put her work away and went to peer down the road. But she saw nothing moving, and after getting the meal started she went to her room and lay down, worn out between joy and fear.

“Wake up, Gran, I'm home,” Danny said, touching her shoulder. As



she jumped and opened her eyes, he added, "Are you all right?"

"And why wouldn't I be?" Sarah Mary said in embarrassment as she sat up. "I never take a nap. But the joy of having you here—"

"Sure," he said gently. "Is dinner ready? I'm starved."

"Oh, good Lord. I'll be right there, lad."

She couldn't tell what he thought of Eileen at all, since he didn't mention her and Sarah Mary couldn't bring herself to ask. He ate his meal, chattering between bites about how beautiful he thought Galway and Donegal were, and how good her chicken was.

"A real banquet," he said at last, pushing his chair back. "I hate cooking for myself."

"For yourself?" Sarah Mary was scandalized. "Doesn't your mam cook for the family?"

Danny drew a long breath. "Mom isn't with us—"

"Oh, the poor dear girl," Sarah Mary said, crossing herself and preparing to mourn. "What took her off? And why wasn't I told?"

"She isn't dead!" Danny said. "Dad didn't want you to know, but I think you should. They're divorced now, Gran, and he has a new wife. But I don't like her, so I live alone in an apartment."

"Divorce? A new wife? Oh, it's destroyed we are this day," Sarah Mary covered her eyes and rocked back and forth in her chair, hardly listening as Danny told her how the six girls were away at school, and since he couldn't live with both his parents he chose not to live with either.

"A sin, that's what it is," Sarah Mary keened. "A mortal sin."

Danny pulled her hands away from her eyes and held them. "Don't take on so, Gran. It's a sin to you, but in America it's no big thing. Anyway, it's done now and can't be changed. Can I ask you something?"

Sarah Mary hid her shock with effort. "Anything, lad. I've no secrets."

"How did Grandda die?"

Oh, the blessed saints, this was worse than Tommy and the divorce. And right after she had said she had no secrets.

"Why do you want to know?" she asked, seeing the trouble on his face.

"Oh, an old dame down the road latched onto me this morning. She told me how you took her in out of Christian charity when her mother died, and she said I didn't look anything like my dad when he was

young. She talked real sly, as if what she said had another meaning. She wanted to go to Donegal with me, but I dumped her in the village. Last thing, she told me to ask you how Paddy Pat died."

Sarah Mary had never been certain what Eileen or the villagers knew or thought about a woman whose man died and left her to raise another woman's child, and her born out of wedlock. Father Shanahan said it didn't matter what other people thought as long as she was honest with herself and God. But now it mattered. Oh, it did matter what Danny would think if she told the truth.

"Your grandda was out in his currach, fishing," she said at last. "He had Eileen's mother with him, and something happened, no one ever really knew—" If she'd been alone, she would have crossed herself for the lie. "The two of them drowned together."

Danny's face cleared. "Is that all? From what the old girl hinted, I thought it was something terrible, like a drunken brawl or murder."

"No," Sarah Mary said firmly. "Nothing like that." She got up and went to the cupboard to bring out the whiskey she kept for emergencies. "I feel the need of a wee nip to calm me down, Danny."

"Great," he said, looking for all the world like his grandfather.

And clear as anything, Sarah Mary saw Paddy Pat sitting closer to Megan than to herself in the currach as they neared shore. She heard Megan say, "Go on, then, do it now if you're a man." And one of them, Sarah Mary refused to believe which one, gave her a mighty shove.

She went into the sea, struggling while the black water tore away her shawl and sucked at her skirts. To save herself, she grabbed the boat and, trying to get in, rocked it clean over. That was when Paddy Pat gave her the terrible look and went to save Megan. When he couldn't find her, he moaned her name and, never even trying to reach Sarah Mary at all, just sank under the kelp to his grave.

Someone had found Sarah Mary unconscious on the shore that night, and when she came to she said, "Take a life, give a life." Nobody knew what she meant because she'd only just found out and hadn't yet told anyone, not even Paddy Pat, that Tommy was coming. And sure it was the hand of God that saved her from the sea purely because of the babe, for without Paddy Pat, sinner that he was, Sarah Mary wouldn't have cared if she lived or not.

A week later they brought her husband's sweater to her, all soggy

with sea water, and that was after she'd stood without tears through his funeral. They never found Megan's body.

The people in the village mostly let Sarah Mary alone—all but Father Shanahan, who comforted her and said it was her duty to take the baby Eileen because Paddy Pat was her father. And when Tommy at sixteen grew sweet on Eileen and Sarah Mary went in despair to the priest, he had advised her to send the lad to relatives in America where he could make something of himself . . .

"Well, come on, Gran. Are you going to stand there with the bottle all night?"

"The Lord forgive me," Sarah Mary said, and poured two whiskeys.

"Hey, this is neat," Danny said. "Good old Irish Mist. Let's drink to Grandda, shall we? He must have been a fine man."

"To Paddy Pat," Sarah Mary said almost sincerely as she raised her glass.



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*Emma was content to let Harold make all the decisions . . .*

# THE PATIO

by  
**ERNEST  
SAVAGE**



**H**arold Haskins was born in the house in which he and his wife Emma lived. For that reason—and also because Emma was an old-fashioned wife—all decisions regarding the house were Harold's to make. He decided when to paint it and what color, and when to reshingle it and when to do this, that, and the other.

Thus it was Harold's decision to put the enclosed patio in the ell formed by the parlor and dining room, and even though Emma would

have preferred it off the kitchen on the other side of the house she had a way of expressing her opinion without necessarily opposing his. They were both in their late fifties and got along well. They had been married for thirty-seven years and were childless and had a very limited income.

The house was situated on the edge of town—a tall, narrow-faced two-story building with a steep pitched roof and a lot of Victorian gingerbread. Downstairs were the parlor, front room, dining room, and kitchen. Upstairs were two bedrooms—Harold and Emma's to the left and Emma's brother Jack's to the right. Behind the house, steeply downgrade, was the barn in which Nellie the cow had her stall and that housed Harold's 1958 Chevy pickup truck and Emma's garden equipment. Emma raised organic vegetables in a half-acre plot to the left of the house and what she didn't preserve she sold in town. Harold did odd jobs around the town and county—everything from plumbing to plowing—and helped Emma in the garden.

In the rectangular patch of ground embraced by the parlor and dining room, there was a framed foundation trench a foot wide and eighteen inches deep. Harold had dug and framed it three years before when they'd finally gotten enough money ahead to build the patio, but then the engine in the Chevy had blown and the patio had to be deferred for the third time. Always, whenever they'd saved enough cash to build the patio, something had happened to absorb the money.

But Harold had patience and had covered the foundation frame with a tarp, knowing that the time would come and the patio would be built. He could see it in his mind's eye and, dreaming, he would sit there and gaze contentedly through the reaching branches of maple and birch to the distant hills. It was the place for it—no doubt of that—despite Emma's claim that the afternoon breeze was fresher on the other side of the house and the view just as interesting.

Every morning at ten-thirty Emma's brother Jack left the house by the front door and went downtown with a brown paper bag in his hand. He was a small skinny man with a large nose and dark squinting eyes. He wore a dark suit at all times, a clean white shirt, a clip-on leather bow tie, and a brown peaked cap pulled low over his eyes. He had a noticeable limp in his right leg. In cool weather he wore a sweater under his coat, and in cold weather a heavy wool overcoat, muffler,

and wool mittens that were knit by Emma and replaced annually as a Christmas gift.

One particular Thursday he wore a sweater under his coat. It was a cool autumn day. The leaves of the maples and birches had been called to the colors, so to speak, but he did not see their resplendent display. His eyes downcast as always, his pace steady and methodical, he neither saw nor heard a living thing until he reached the corner of Nathan Hale Road and turned left. And then, still blind and dumb to the world, he turned into Brady's Saloon and took up a seat at the corner of the bar where it curved into the wall.

He could have done all this in his sleep and Brady could have, and did, serve him in the same manner, reflexively, without thought or word. Shot of bourbon, beer chaser. Jack was part of the fabric of town; like the bells in the tower of Saint Matthias, or the rounds of "Silent Bill" Perkins the mailman, to be noticed only when late, or when gone.

But thirty-three years ago Jack had been a hero; in fact, *the* hero. He had been wounded on D-Day at Omaha Beach in Normandy and discharged from the hospital a year and ten days later, disabled and pensioned, a noble survivor of the last of the popular wars. The town, like the whole country, was in a state of suspended euphoria between the end of the war in Europe and the end of the war in the Pacific, and Jack, cane in hand, was met at the station by every elected official of the town and half its citizens. For the rest of that summer he wasn't allowed to buy a drink for himself or walk a half a block by himself. He was the town's hero.

It was all an accident of timing. Anyone coming in on that train on that day would have been the beneficiary of the town's patriotic passion. That it should have been Jack was a grotesque joke, for he had gotten his wounds running back toward the landing craft that had brought him in, screaming for his mother. But Jack, of course, did not reveal this. In fact, he almost forgot it himself—almost, but not quite.

And then his summer of glory was over. The town fell back into its ancient patterns and relationships and Jack began to buy his own drinks again. He had been living in Bishop's Hotel, facing the square, but now it was too dear for him, and too alien. He moved in with his sister and brother-in-law at two dollars a day, room and board. Even then Emma knew she could never have a child and that the second

bedroom upstairs would be available as long as Jack wanted it. He was, after all, family *and* a hero, and probably would not stay long anyway.

But he stayed and stayed and looked less and less like a hero, and less and less like family, until finally he was a dark and silent presence in the house, like dry rot. And thirty-three years later he was still paying two dollars a day.

Harold drove into the square that Thursday afternoon and parked in front of Doc Benchley's office next to Bishop's Hotel. Doc Benchley had said he wanted to see him, and because Harold knew why he wanted to see him, he sat there for several minutes without moving, a knot of worry in his mind. He had a load of manure in the truck for Emma's garden, fall mulch that he'd traded the Widow Wilson for three hours of carpentry work. It smelled pretty rich, but Harold wasn't thinking about that; he was thinking about Emma and about how much he loved her.

Then, with a great deal of surprise, he saw his brother-in-law limp across the square from Brady's Saloon and enter the library next to the city hall. "Well, I'll be damned!" he muttered softly. Jack *never* went to the library. What Jack did, invariably, day after day, year after year, was sit in Brady's Saloon from quarter to eleven in the morning until quarter to five in the afternoon, nursing six thirty-cent beers through the day, after the opening shot of bourbon, and at exactly twelve noon eat the sandwich that Emma had packed for him in the brown paper bag. Then he went home, took his dinner up to his room, and watched TV on his private black-and-white sixteen-inch until the end of Johnny Carson. Then he went to bed. He never did anything else, *never*. And now here he was going into the library and Harold was stirred enough despite his worry to wonder why. He got out of the truck and followed Jack into the building.

Harold and Emma were well known in the library. The only TV in their house was Jack's and so he and Emma did a lot of reading. Muriel Welch was the librarian and when Harold entered the big, high-ceilinged room he held his finger to his lips so that Muriel wouldn't speak his name. Behind her at the reading table was Jack, leafing slowly through a *National Geographic*, with a stack of them alongside him on the table.

"For about a month now," Muriel whispered. "Every afternoon." She shrugged.

"Well, I'll be damned," Harold said and turned and walked away.

By the time he saw the doctor and unloaded the manure behind the barn and got himself cleaned up it was nearly six and Emma had to take their supper from the warming oven. Seated opposite her at the kitchen table, he felt such a rush of love for her that he almost gasped. One year at the least, Doc Benchley had told him, two years at the most, and not a damn thing to be done about it one way or another. Harold put the food in his mouth and made himself eat it and made himself smile and declare it good because she never ate a bite until he'd passed judgment on it. And it always was good, or better than good, all the way up to wonderful, which is just the way he'd rate Emma herself—good to wonderful, and never in thirty-seven years a word of complaint. Of course, she wasn't always *right*, as for instance about where to put the patio and about doing her brother's white shirts for nothing. There were three of them right there behind her now, hanging on the kitchen line!

He got up and helped her with the dishes as he always did, and when they were finished he hugged her and told her she was still the prettiest girl in town. She said, "Oh, pshaw," but she was, even with the greyish-looking circles that had been growing under her eyes for the last six months or so. He and Doc Benchley had decided not to tell her what it was, because they knew she would worry more about what would happen to him after she was gone than about what was happening to her now.

With the kitchen work done, Harold went out to the barn and sat down on the milking stool next to Nellie, put his face in his hands, and cried. If only he could build her that damn patio before she went! But he didn't have the money for it and the way things were going he never would. Except maybe for one possibility, he thought suddenly, his face snapping up from his cupped hands. There was a possibility—and he'd better get a move on before it disappeared too.

Harold went into Jack's room just twice a year—to help Emma turn the mattress on his bed—and that was twice too much. He disliked his brother-in-law so thoroughly that it carried over to his room and his things, even to the air that he sucked in and out of his skinny little lungs. But Friday afternoon at three-thirty, with Emma downtown for the weekly shopping, he was in Jack's room looking for money and



feeling fine about it, cool and righteous.

Jack had his disability check sent to a post-office box downtown and cashed it at the bank first thing every month. He handed Emma sixty dollars of it, no matter how many days the month had (which came out ten dollars a year short, if you figured it out) and spent about the same amount per month for booze. What he did with the rest of it was what Harold was aiming to find out.

There were a lot of hiding places around the big room, with its foot-high baseboards, wide door-moldings, closet, big brass bed, and old Axminster rug. If you had the mind of a rat, where would you stash your money? Harold rubbed his hands together and felt the blood dancing through his veins. Hell, he thought, I should have done this twenty years ago.

Where?

Many places, a dozen places! In twenty minutes Harold had collected over a thousand dollars and was standing in the middle of the room with it bunched in his hand when Jack came in. Harold hadn't heard him enter the house, hardly even saw him now, standing in the door with his mouth open and his eyes glittering like cheap jewels strung too close together.

"Hand it over," Jack said, "and git out of here!"

Harold sat down in the overstuffed chair out of which he'd pulled two hundred of the dollars and began sorting the money on the floor by denominations—tens, twenties, and fifties. He felt terrific.

"The way I figure," he said, "you owe Emma ten dollars a year for thirty-three years. That's three hundred and thirty dollars."

"The deal was sixty dollars a month! I don't owe nobody nothin'!"

"Plus two bits a day," Harold went on dreamily, "for washing and ironing your useless white shirts. That comes to"—he paused to figure—"ninety dollars a year times thirty-three years; which comes to—Holy Toledo! Nearly three thousand dollars, would you believe it! Hell, Jack, there ain't enough here to cover, not half enough."

Jack took a step into the room, his face purple with rage. "The shirts was free, Emma told me so herself. I don't owe nobody nothin'! Gimme that money and git out of here!"

"In due time," Harold said and went on sorting and counting the bills until he'd finished. "Twelve hundred and forty dollars—like I said, not near enough to cover." He stood up and looked at Jack with a

seraphic grin on his face. "But I'll tell you what, hero brother-in-law, I'll settle the whole account for five hundred dollars. What do you say? Biggest bargain of your whole goddamn useless life."

"I say no! It's all mine and I'll keep it all!" He took another step toward Harold, his face white now, his hands trembling.

"How come," Harold said, wondering about it for the first time, "you're home at this hour of the day?"

"Because I figured you was up to something when I seen you spying on me in the library yesterday. Always figured you was a sneak and now by God if you ain't proved it. Hand over my money!"

"Minus the five hundred."

They were five feet apart, eyes locked, bodies rigid. Twice before Harold had petitioned Jack for a raise in his two-dollar room-and-board bill, but he had been turned down flat both times. Jack, knowing he provided the household's only stable income, wouldn't budge.

"Minus nothin'!" he said. "A deal's a deal."

Harold sighed. "New round of cards this time, Jack," he said. "I'm keeping the five hundred."

"If you do—I'll leave!"

Harold sighed again. It was a consummation as devoutly to be feared as wished. His dislike of Jack was mounting to a bug-squashing hatred. Emma had at least a year, Doc Benchley had said. At \$60.00 a month that was \$720 and where would they get it if not from this? He looked at the wad of money in his hand and peeled off exactly \$720.

"I take it," he said without joy, "that you're giving a year's notice, and I accept. Take your time about packing and the shirts'll be free as usual, courtesy of the house." Then he noticed with a thrill of amazement the knife in Jack's hand. "Put that away," he heard himself say.

"No way are you gonna rob me." Jack crouched, the knife flat in the palm of his hand.

"You've been robbing us a little bit every day for thirty-three years, Jack. I'm just bringing us about a quarter of the way even. Put the knife away."

"I'll put it in your gizzard!" Jack snarled. "I ain't runnin' this time! I ain't turnin' my back this time!"

Harold got his hands ready. The little rat seemed to mean it.

Police Chief Perry Watkins usually had an Irish coffee at Brady's Sa-

loon early in the afternoon, and the following Tuesday was no exception. After he'd taken a warming sip of the drink and his eyes had adjusted to the bar's gloomy light he said to Brady, "Where's Jack?"

"Damned if I know," Brady said, glad to have been asked. Nobody had asked him that yet and it gnawed on him a little. "He ain't been in since Friday, Perry. First time he's missed four days in a row since I can remember. He must be sick."

"Must be," Perry said, gazing at Jack's empty stool. "Funny little twit of a man, ain't he?" He had forgotten that Jack had been a hero once. Everybody had.

The patio was wrong, dead wrong. Harold had nailed in the last screen frame and straightened up and looked around, knowing it was in the wrong place, at the wrong height, *all* wrong. He'd known it for the last three or four hours but had finished it off out of sheer dumb perversity, just to punish himself. Standing there, he felt sick, throwing-up sick.

"Damn!" he muttered, letting the hammer drop to the deck. "Damn, damn, damn!" All those years of wanting it and now here it was—all wrong.

Emma heard the hammer fall and came out and stood next to him. She put her arm around his waist and could feel the terrible disappointment in him. She kissed him on his bristly cheek. He had been working on the patio like a demon since Saturday morning, hadn't even shaved, and it was a mistake. They both knew it and there was nothing to be said or done about it.

Emma dropped her arm and went back inside to finish fixing supper. When she was out of earshot he said, "You were right, by damn! It should have been on the other side."

But here it was and here it would remain. The patio fund was gone, more than gone. Feeling a little flush Saturday morning at the lumber yard Harold had overspent on it, got redwood for the deck and screen frames instead of fir. Gone, all gone and all wrong, every dime of it now a monument to foolish male pride. And he'd done it only for her.

Harold was still pondering on the fiasco when Perry Watkins drove into the yard, parked his police car alongside the patio, and got out.

"Hey, pretty nice," he said, and wrapped a beefy hand around one of Harold's screen frames and shook it. Not a wiggle; strong, like ev-

everything Harold built. "Come by to check on Jack," Perry said, and Harold, who knew the chief of police didn't normally run around counting the citizens, felt a little click inside, like a light coming on somewhere. "Where is he, sick or something?"

Harold gazed at him for a moment, getting him into focus and letting the light in his mind grow a little. "Not sick," he said. "At least not as far as I know. Just gone. He took off Friday."

Perry's brows arched. "Just packed up and left?"

"Didn't pack up, just left." Harold let his eyes fall.

"Didn't pack up, just left, eh? Where to?"

"He didn't say."

"He didn't say, eh? Just packed up and left and didn't say where to, eh?"

"Didn't pack up."

Chief Watkins took off his peaked cap, scratched his head, and looked at Harold's new patio and the concrete foundation under it, deep and thick. "No forwarding address? No note?"

"No note. No nothing," Harold watched the chief walk along the new foundation, tapping it with the toe of his boot now and again in dark speculation, and almost grinned, the light flooding his mind now. The thing is, he was thinking, everybody in town knows I hate Jack and always have, and everybody knows I'd kill him if there was a good reason.

"Mind if I take a look at his room?" Chief Watkins said.

"What?" Harold allowed himself to look worried, and cleared his throat. "Why would you want to do that, Perry?"

"Well, I got to, don't I? Citizen of the town is missing. I got to investigate, don't I?"

"Well, help yourself then," Harold said, and watched the chief go around to the kitchen door. Then he picked up the hammer from the patio deck and twirled it two or three times in the air, catching it neat as a pin. Maybe Emma would get a proper patio after all.

Wednesday morning, toward noon, Chief Watkins waved Harold's truck over to the curb on Nathan Hale Road, and Harold, who'd been cruising around downtown for nearly an hour, thought it was about time. Watkins got out of his car and came over and stood by Harold's door. "Funny thing," he said, "Jack didn't leave no forwarding address

at the post office neither."

"Maybe he will when he gets to where he's going, Perry."

"I've got this feeling he's *got* to where he's going, Harold."

"Meaning what?"

"Meaning he's still out around your place somewhere."

"Like where?"

"Like maybe in that fresh concrete you poured."

Harold hoped his face turned a trifle pale. "What makes you think that, Perry?"

"Man just doesn't disappear like Jack did, after all these years. It ain't natural."

"First time for everything, Perry."

Watkins squared the cap on his head. "I think I'd like a look," he said.

"At what?"

"That concrete footing."

"You couldn't take a look at it without tearing the whole thing down, Perry."

"Have to do it, I guess."

"Don't want you to."

"How else can I find out if that's where he's at?"

"No way. But I don't want you to do it."

"I don't blame you, but I got to, Harold."

"Well, you got to get a court order first."

"Can do."

"And you got to pay for it."

"How much you figure?"

"Whole thing cost me over five hundred."

"No!"

"Yup. Got the receipts. Plus a hundred for my labor."

The chief shook his head. "Six hundred, huh? The Town Council ain't going to like that."

"Then forget about it, Perry. Six men like Jack ain't worth a hundred apiece."

"I can't forget about it, Harold. I got to do it. I agree with you about Jack, though."

"Then bring the money with you. I want you to have it with you when you get here."

"Well, if I come, that's the way it'll be."

"Your choice, Perry."

That night Harold thought Emma was looking better. The circles under her eyes seemed to be fainter, she seemed to be standing up straighter, and once or twice he heard her whistling like she used to. After supper she took up her knitting and sat down by the fire Harold had built in the front room and looked so good in the rosy light Harold could hardly believe his eyes.

She hadn't mentioned her brother once. Friday evening when he failed to appear for supper she quietly put his plate away, and Saturday evening she didn't even get it out. And not a word about it. What will be will be was her line, as always.

Later that Wednesday night Harold banked the fire and they went upstairs together hand in hand, like a couple of kids, making all the noise they wanted. It was like being well after a long illness; and, Harold told himself, worth whatever the cost might be.

Next morning Chief Watkins was there at eight-thirty with a couple of men and a lot of heavy wrecking tools. Harold had figured he'd show up and had hung around waiting, a little nervously. It could go wrong, he thought. Emma was in the kitchen making applesauce.

"Let's see the money," Harold said, and Chief Watkins fished in his jacket and handed over a check. Harold examined it, shaking his head. "I wanted cash, Perry."

"Same thing, Harold. It's signed by the town treasurer."

"I'd prefer it in money, cash money."

"You're stalling, Harold, and it won't do no good. I got a court order."

Harold sighed and put the check in his pocket and sat down on a stump facing the patio.

"You don't have to watch if you don't want to," Chief Watkins said. "I wouldn't blame you if you didn't." He put his cap back on and signaled the men to start.

Two hours later they had all the lumber off down to the foundation and were in a heavy sweat. One of the men said it was the best built thing he'd ever had to tear down and it was a damn shame. He was hunkered down resting when Emma came out of the basement door with a pitcher of cold cider and some glasses. She passed it around,

pausing long enough in front of Harold to catch the quick wink of his eye and then went back in. He hadn't told her that Perry was coming to tear down the patio and she had been growing uneasy. He heard her whistling a little later as the men went to work on the concrete with their sledges.

"Well now," Harold said when it was done, "who gets to clean up the mess?"

Chief Watkins was kicking through the heap of concrete rubble, his cap off. "Damn!" he said. "I was sure Jack was in amongst all this. Would've bet on it—*did* bet on it."

"Hell of a place for a man to be, Perry."

"Not so bad for Jack though. Little twit of a man, wasn't he?"

"Yes," Harold said. He was gazing wryly at the debris, still wondering why he'd ever put the thing there in the first place, but halfway pleased with himself again. The two workmen were standing by, covered with sweat and dust, and hungry for lunch. Harold said, "Come on in the basement and cool off, have some more cider."

Inside, Chief Watkins sat on a long coffin-shaped tool box alongside Harold's workbench and looked at the rows of Emma's preserves on the far wall. It was cool enough to send a chill up your back, but it felt good after the Indian summer sun. They were nice people, the Haskins, he thought, all things considered, but he still had a seat-of-the-pants feeling that Jack was around the place somewhere.

"I'll tell you what," Harold said, "I'll clean up the mess. You fellas just go on back to town."

"Nice of you," the chief said, and got up off the box and put his empty glass on the bench. "I suppose I should apologize, but damned if I feel like it, Harold."

"Don't bother, Perry. Nice lot of firewood I got for your trouble. It could be a cold winter and it's coming on fast."

It was a perfect patio—it couldn't have been better. Harold knew it was perfect when the first plank went down across the girders. "Hot damn!" he said. When it was finished late Sunday afternoon Emma came out from the kitchen and put her arm around his waist and squeezed it. That was all; no I-told-you-so stuff, just her body pressed against his in affirmation. Lord! it was almost a miracle how much better she was looking. Maybe it was one of those remission things you

read about. Next summer—and maybe a lot more summers after that, he was beginning to feel—they'd sit here of an early evening and then go in and read a spell before going upstairs to bed in their own house all by themselves. Hot damn!

Chief Watkins came by the following Friday. He hadn't closed the file on Jack and it bugged him; he didn't have many open files. He found Harold in the barn, head down under the raised hood of the Chevy, changing the oil for the winter.

"I talked to Muriel at the library," the chief said. "She told me Jack had been reading a lot of travel stuff and was maybe going away. He was reading travel stuff for a month or more, she said."

"Fits, don't it?" Harold said, straightening up.

"Not snug, it don't. He still hasn't notified the post office of a change of address. A man would do that, wouldn't he? I still got the feeling he's around here somewhere, Harold. I want to get the case closed."

"I got the feeling we've been over this before, Perry."

"And I got the feeling he's still here, Harold. Can't get rid of it."

"Like where here?"

"Like that tool box of yours I put my butt down on last week maybe."

"Let's look."

They walked up the slope and went in the basement door.

Chief Watkins opened the tool box. There was a posthole digger inside, cleaned and oiled for the winter, and a bunch of hickory mattox handles. Harold was a neat man.

"Fit in there, wouldn't he?" Chief Watkins said.

"Well, he wasn't much of a man."

"Stay nice and fresh too, wouldn't he?"

"It's always cool here in the basement, Perry."

"I sat right in the middle of his chest, by God!" the chief said. "And I give you the idea too, didn't I? You hadn't figured out what to do with him until I came along, had you, Harold?"

The chief went back outside and around the house to Emma's patio, trailed by Harold. He looked at the concrete footing for a long time, touching it with the toe of his boot.

"No way I could get the Council to fork up another six hundred bucks," he said, "no way in the world. How come you didn't put it back where it was?"



"I didn't want it there, I wanted it here."

The chief looked at him for quite a while. "Worked out pretty good for you, didn't it, Harold?"

"Things do, Perry, if a fella waits for the breaks."

It was the last day of Indian summer, you could tell it from the air. Harold and Emma sat out on the patio and savored the waning day. Emma was rocking quietly in her favorite wicker chair, looking well.

"Jack would have liked it, I think," she said. "I believe he would have."

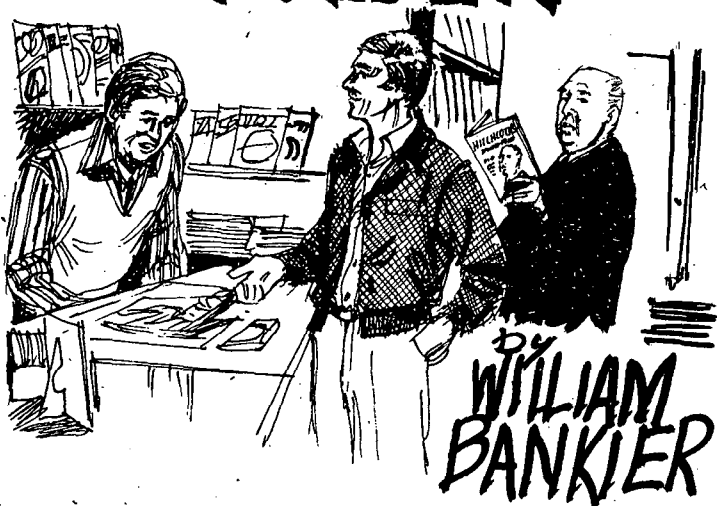
"Maybe," Harold said judiciously. "He built it—so to speak."

The day after Thanksgiving Emma got a card from her brother from San Diego. He said he was staying with an old Army friend. He said it was warmer there and he wouldn't need new mittens for Christmas.



Stanley Coke knew the difference between right and wrong . . .

# THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER



Now that it's over, I keep thinking of Peggy telling me that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. And ugliness, indecency, and smut. I could never believe that. Surely there are things—pictures, deeds, performances—that are handsome or mean of themselves and would be even if they existed in a society of the blind.

Anyway, it meant something to me when she said it because for years, ever since I was a boy, I have sensed that I am being observed.

If you like, you can capitalize the word "beholder" and it may help make my motivation clear. Or obscure—I don't know. Even in my cell alone, with the rest of my life set aside for thinking, I doubt if I'll ever get it straight.

But I can remember when it started, my being this way. I was fourteen years old, out of school, and working as a bellboy in a small hotel. And one summer evening, I steamed through the dining room in my white mess jacket, paging a customer who turned out not to be there. "Mr. Armitage. Is Mr. Armitage in the dining room?" I said it loud and clear because I liked this part of the job, being "on," being at the center of the scene.

Later, my father said he heard from Judge Lloyd that I was going to be a great success in life. My father was night clerk on the hotel desk and the judge was a permanent resident:

"You can tell from that clear eye of his," the judge said. "The boy is going places." From that moment on, I knew I was being watched, and rated, and I've always tried to do what was absolutely right. Yes, even when I took the lead pipe to Clive Hunter's head I was convinced while it was happening that the boy had it coming.

Anyway, some people might say that Judge Lloyd's prediction that I was going places turned out to be a joke because I only went a block down the street and into a small news-agent shop. But I was proud of it. I've never believed you have to be the president of a university to call yourself a success. We put my name on the window in gold leaf—Stanley Coke, Magazines, Newspapers, Tobacco—and we made a living.

We. I was married now to Peggy. She served the front four tables in the dining room and had done so for years. In fact, it was her money that set us up in the shop, savings from tips for being twice as good as any other waitress the hotel ever had. Yes, she was older than I was and some of them said she was robbing the cradle when she married me, but I loved her, and I still do. Peggy looks just like Betty Grable used to, only shorter and a little heavier.

The trouble in the shop began to happen in the last couple of years. That's because before then those damned magazines were not so prevalent. People only expected to find them in one or two places that specialized in the ugly stuff. But now all of a sudden we've got free-

dom, we've got the new morality, and skin books are up and down the street like rotting leaves after a season of rain.

Would we have been so hungry for the extra money if it hadn't been for Beverly? I don't know. A teenaged daughter wants a lot of looking after, especially when she's bright and has her sights set on a college education.

So that was how the pressure began to build on me. Peggy would stand in front of the magazine rack while we were changing over shifts and she'd say, "I was talking to Mike the other day when he delivered. He says there's room here for a complete line of men's magazines."

"Mike would say that. He's a distributor. He makes money from distributing that porn."

"It isn't porn. They're girlie magazines. And we could make money out of them too. Money we need."

"I don't want that kind of money."

"They sell for over a dollar a copy. We have to sell a lot of papers and newsmagazines to earn that kind of markup."

"I still don't want it, Peg. I don't even want to talk about it."

At home, Beverly started getting into the act. We always sat down to dinner together, no matter what. I'd even close the shop for an hour so the three of us could face each other around the table. I would never have thought it was a family any other way. Now I'm taking my meals with all these madmen in the big hall and if anything is going to break me before my time, this will be it.

Anyway, the subject of tuition fees had come up and I must have shown in my eyes or the tilt of my head that it was going to be hard to find because Peggy, who sees an objective and goes for it, said, "We could have that money clear in a few months if we put in the men's magazines."

"Forget it," I said. "We'll find it some other way."

Then Beverly said in her cool way, "I'm with Mom. You're so old-fashioned, Daddy. I don't know what all the fuss is about." Kids are certainly different today. Bev treats me and her mother as if we're all the same generation, and I guess that's all right.

"The fuss is about getting money into this house in a way we don't have to be ashamed of," I said.

"There's an easy answer," Beverly said. "I'll forget about college and get a job."

"You'll do no such thing," Peggy said. "Leave this to me and your father. We'll work it out."

Nothing more could be said at the moment because Clive Hunter arrived to take Beverly to a rock concert. He had his long-lensed camera with him because he was doing a picture spread on the concert for some underground magazine. The boy is only starting but he expects to be the Avedon of the future. That's the nice thing about being 19 years old . . . who can say how far you'll go? In Clive's case, it was not much farther but even I didn't know that just then.

In the front hall, my daughter did that thing she likes to do that separates her from my league; I keep silent about family matters but Bev feels the more opinions the better.

"Dad has a thing going about girlie magazines," she said and went on to explain how and why I refused to sell them. And she asked Clive what he thought about that.

"With respect, sir," the boy said, "I think history has passed you by. The whole issue of nudity and sex has been defused precisely because of all the exposure it's received. And the magazines you decry have had a lot to do with this. You're fighting a rearguard action in a war that has ended."

"Exactly!" Beverly said. "You're like that Japanese soldier they flushed out of a bunker on a Pacific island a few years ago."

"And I'm good for another twenty-five years," I said, aware of how stubborn I sounded.

"But, Stan," Peggy said, and there was desperation in her voice, "if you don't sell them, people just buy them at the shop down the street."

"That still doesn't make it right. Let those guys live with their consciences."

"What consciences? What's so evil?" Beverly was not laughing at me now. She was on the verge of angry tears. "My friends and I are not ashamed of our bodies. Pictures can be exciting, they can be beautiful."

"Maybe that goes for young people," I conceded. "But the magazines we're talking about are bought by men of my generation or older. And they don't buy them because they're beautiful. They buy them because they're *dirty*!"

Clive Hunter was lurking in the doorway, the great evil camera lens

protruding from the box around his neck. "Come on, Bev, we'll be late for the gig."

When they were gone, Peggy had the last word. "If those men get pleasure out of looking at magazines like that, where is the harm? Who is being hurt?" I didn't think this required an answer.

A few days later, Beverly had a conversation with me, but it was so brief and casual I didn't give it any thought at the time.

"Dad, I've got a way to make some extra money, enough to help with the tuition fees."

"What is it?"

She let that slip past. "But before I say yes, I want to know if you're definite about not selling the magazines."

"As definite as I've ever been in my life."

She gave a short, flat laugh. "That's quite definite," she said. "So I guess there's no other way." And she drifted off without saying any more.

We saved hard through the spring and summer. By autumn the money for the fees had been set aside and Beverly was beginning to attend classes at the college. Meanwhile, Peg and I kept on slugging, selling papers, cigarettes, candy, paying our taxes and complaining about how hard it is for the little guy to prosper. But I wasn't really unhappy. I watched the television news every night, seeing Asian and African families pulling themselves out of the latest catastrophes, and I realized how lucky we were to get up every morning with the same roof over our heads.

Then it happened. Mike from the distributor's came in one afternoon with kind of a smile on his face. He's never liked me since I put a few labels on him. Today he changed the out-of-date publications and then, on his way out, tossed a glossy-covered magazine on the counter in front of me.

"Take a look at that, Stanley," he said. "It may change your way of thinking." Then he was gone.

The magazine was called *Buxom Broads*. I took one look at the cover and almost tossed it into the garbage. Had I done, I might not be in this cell today. But instead, I flipped through it quickly, my heart starting to pound as I saw the spreads of naked girls, black ones, blonde ones, every shape and race.

Then I saw Beverly. They only mentioned her first name, but they used everything else she had. She was referred to in the blurb as a promising young city model on her first assignment.

It was as if my throbbing heart pumped a curtain of blood across my eyes. But some instinct kept me on the track of where I wanted to go. Before I left the shop, I picked up the ten-inch length of lead pipe I used to weigh down the papers on the outdoor stand. I put it in my inside breast pocket and headed for the loft Beverly had described as Clive's pad.

He was there, studying some prints on a light-box. He knew something was wrong and started to speak but I gave him no time. It was like cleaning up a noxious mess—I got at it and got it finished while the fever was on me, six heavy blows on his hairy head. Then I tossed the pipe aside and telephoned the police, anxious to tell them what I had done—still eager, you see, to appear righteous in the eye of the Beholder.

Peggy saw me in the cell. I was calm by then, and sadder than I could ever tell her. It was premeditated murder, what with me bringing the weapon in my pocket, so Stanley Coke was going away for a long, long time.

Beverly came in, dark-faced with rage and shame that submerged any pity she may one day feel. "You did this because of the pictures," she said.

Peggy didn't know about the magazine and had to be told. "So I felt justified," I said. "After the way he debased you."

"Debased or not," Beverly hissed at me, "if you'd taken the time to read the photo credit you'd have seen it wasn't Clive's work! It was done by a friend of his who contributes to all those magazines." She started to cry. "You sick fool," she sobbed, "you killed an innocent man."

Now they're calling us out for exercise and, as usual, I will be the outstanding man in the yard, walking straighter, wearing my uniform better, doing exactly what is expected of me. I intend to continue this way even though I may be a prisoner here for the rest of my life. Some of the others don't seem to care how they behave . . . they slouch, they curse, they cheat and break the rules. It's as if they don't know the difference between right and wrong.

*Something underhanded was going on . . .*

# WHERE IS, AS IS

by  
**JOHN LUTZ**

"I travel about," Thornton Neely said to Lieutenant Hadeker, "buying and selling antiques for a living. And I'm sure that something underhanded is going on."

"Ah," Hadeker said, leaning forward.

"At Colonel Speedwing's auction last month I saw a Tiffany table lamp sold for over ten thousand dollars. It is quite a rare lamp, with iridescent gold shades—but that's still a rather high price. Then, last



week, I saw what was unquestionably the same lamp at Mendlebee's auction in Wyoming." Neely sat back and stared at Hadeker, a haughty lift to his features.

"Point?" Hadeker said.

Neely smiled a faint, tolerant smile. "The point is that I overheard Colonel Mendlebee mention that he'd bought the lamp from Colonel Speedwing."

"Perhaps the original purchaser returned it to Speedwing."

"I thought of that and checked, surreptitiously of course. Speedwing maintains that the original purchaser took the lamp. I didn't reveal that I had bought that same lamp in Wyoming for slightly over eight thousand dollars."

Hadeker leaned back in his swivel chair and gazed about his tiny decrepit office. He could hear the metallic, monotonous voice of the police dispatcher from a speaker on the other side of his door, a constant reminder of the troubled outside world. "Mr. Neely, it doesn't follow that anything actually criminal—"

"Antiques are my business, Lieutenant, and I have a feel for such things when my livelihood—or call it my obsession—is threatened. Surely you'll want to look into it; you *are* the police."

Hadeker idly folded a sheet of blank typing paper in half lengthwise and ran his thumbnail along the crease. A difference of two thousand dollars on the same item was considerable. And it appeared that this Colonel Speedwing had lied. But Hadeker knew nothing about Tiffany lamps; or antiques in general. He'd never even been to any sort of auction. Still . . . "You're right," he said, "it bears looking into."

Neely nodded and stood. He was a tall man with an elegant leanness.

"You'll let me know, won't you, if anything comes of the investigation?"

"Certainly," Hadeker said, standing and shaking hands with Neely. He remained standing as Neely walked out, trying to decide whether the antique dealer was a conscientious citizen or merely a busybody.

Hadeker looked in the phone directory for the number of Speedwing's Antique Auction House. He called, talked to a polite woman, and found that the next auction was scheduled for that Friday night. Since he was free that night, he decided to put on his best suit and go to the auction himself . . .

If anything, Hadeker was overdressed. The auction wasn't at all the genteel affair he'd imagined. It was in a converted dilapidated warehouse, lined with rows of scarred metal folding chairs. The auctioneer, Colonel Charles Speedwing, was a middle-aged, gap-toothed man in baggy brown pants and a faded yellow shirt stretched taut across a stomach more ample than Hadeker's.

Speedwing stood on a raised platform behind a crude plywood lectern. Next to him sat a long-faced woman wielding a pencil over an open ledger book. Directly in front of the lectern was a brilliantly lit heavy wood table—the “ring”—where the items on auction were shown individually. The setup had the stripped-down, all-business aura of a place where big money changed hands without facade or protocol.

Each person intending to bid had registered and been assigned a number, written in bold black-inked numerals on an identifying white card. The bidding was to start in fifteen minutes. Now it was time to examine the merchandise close up. Over a hundred people were strolling amid rows of furniture and hovering over tables spread with glittering silver and glassware. On other tables lay dark metal objects with the rusty look of age. Hadeker stood a while near an ornate Victorian chiffonade and watched people stare at, prod, and caress the merchandise. An obese man in a T-shirt picked up a piece of delicate cut-glass and examined the bottom for markings; a grey-haired man in a business suit tugged at the leather fittings of an old harness; a sharp-featured man chewing a mangled toothpick stood staring idly toward some empty chairs as if disinterested in the treasures surrounding him.

The colonel beamed his gap-toothed grin and slammed a wooden gavel on the lectern top. “We’re about to start, folks, if everybody’ll please get seated. Terms of the sale are cash or a check for the full amount, and all merchandise is sold where is, as is. Soon as the bidding’s closed, you’re the new owner.”

Obediently the crowd milled toward the folding chairs, and within a few minutes almost everyone was seated. Those without chairs stood along the walls.

Two men stood by the bare table beneath the brilliant lights. One was muscular and completely bald, wearing a stained white shirt unbuttoned to reveal matted dark chest hair. The other ring man was older—nearing fifty—small and wiry.

“Whadda wee got, boys?” the auctioneer sang loudly.

The bald man held up a tiny jar in a metal holder. The jar caught the bright overhead light and glinted with diamond brilliance.

The colonel's grin was almost as bright. "Hey, she's a cut-glass pickle jar!"

"Made by Heisey!" the bald man shouted, gazing at the jar with something like rapture.

"Oh, sheee's a beauty! Do I hear eighty? Seventy? I got forty! Now forty-five . . . now forty-five. . . ."

"Hyup!" the wiry man shouted, springing into the air and pointing a gnarled finger toward a bidder in the crowd.

Colonel Speedwing began to chant, words faster and closer together, tumbling into each other in a mesmerizing rhythm as the ring men beneath him jumped and writhed, searching the crowd hungrily for bidders. Light seemed to spark from the cut-glass pickle jar as the colonel's voice soared.

"Who'll giive me fifty now? Now fifty-five?"

"Hyup!"

"Now fifty-seven-and-a-half, now sixty, now sixty-two-and-a-half, now sixty-five, sixty-five, five, five, five . . . Sold to Number Forty-seven! Hey, whadda weee got now, boys?"

Hadeker sat fascinated while candle holders and broken china dolls sold for hundreds, mantle clocks and porcelain vases for thousands. A dainty walnut desk sold for \$6,000 with the same swift and rhythmic casualness that accompanied the sale of the pickle jar. Hadeker opened a pocket-sized notebook and began making notes of items, prices, and buyer numbers.

Halfway through the sale, a small graceful sofa was brought into the ring.

"Saaay now," the colonel said reverently, "that is something! Duncan Phyfe mahogany! Should bring eight thousand anywhere! Do I hear eight? Seven? Six? Five?"

"Hyup!"

"I got five thousand, now fifty-five hundred, fifty-five, fifty-fiiive . . . now six, six, six . . ."

Hadeker looked about and saw that two bidders were now active: the sharp-featured man with the mangled toothpick and a heavy-set woman with a perfectly bland face that reminded him of peaceful morgue shots he'd seen.

"I got six!" Colonel Speedwing shouted. He aimed the long wooden handle of his gavel at the woman. "Six-fiiive now . . ."

"Hyup!"

The gavel handle swung to point at the man, whō had switched his toothpick to the left corner of his mouth and nodded once curtly.

"Give me seven now! Seven, seven . . . six-seven-fiftee . . ."

The woman nodded, jutting her lower lip. The gavel handle made its arc.

"Now seven! I need seven, only seven . . ." He nodded. "Seven-two-fifty noooowww! . . ."

The woman shook her head decisively and turned away.

"Sold at seven to Number Twenty-six!"

Hadeker made a note of the buyer and the price and wished he could get that much for his entire two-year-old livingroom suite.

"Hey, look at that genuine antique gun!" the colonel's amplified voice exclaimed.

Hadeker sat through the rest of the auction, which lasted until almost eleven o'clock, and decided that if nothing else came of his night's work he'd been entertained.

In his office the next day, Hadeker looked over the list of the previous night's sales. The most expensive items had been the sofa, a Chippendale bookcase, and a bronze figurine. These three items went for a total of \$22,000. The sofa and figurine had been sold to Number Twenty-six—the sharp-faced man. The bookcase had gone to Number Seventy. Reading down the list of items, Hadeker saw that Number Twenty-six had spent an additional \$12,000. Number Seventy had spent \$17,000 more. There were nine other numbers whose owners had spent totals of over \$10,000.

Hadeker pressed an intercom button and asked to see Sergeant Knapp.

John Knapp was a large, shambling man with the advantage of appearing dull while possessing a formidably acute intellect. He stood now in front of Hadeker, in plainclothes, one leg angled at the knee as if it were longer than the other, thumbs tucked into the corners of his pockets.

Hadeker instructed Knapp to watch Speedwing's Antique Auction House and gave him a duplicate list of items that had been sold there

the night before. He also gave Knapp descriptions of Colonel Speedwing and his two ring workers, and of the owners of the numbers that had spent the largest amounts of money at the auction. Knapp nodded and ambled from the office and Hadeker sat down and read over yesterday's misspelled reports.

Three days later Knapp entered Hadeker's office and reported that the sofa, a four-poster bed, and the bronze figurine had been loaded onto a truck bound for an antique auction in Indianapolis, where Speedwing had consigned them for sale.

At the Speedwing auction Hadeker had attended, the four-poster had ostensibly been sold to Number Fifty-two, one of the biggest spenders at the auction. Hadeker didn't remember precisely what the man looked like, though he'd made a note of his description alongside the number—"Medium height and weight, fair complexion, blond hair thinning at the crown, mole beneath left eye." This spurred his memory and he recalled the man vividly. He gave Knapp a detailed description of him and Number Twenty-six, the sharp-featured man with the toothpick, and ordered that he attend the next Speedwing auction and follow the two men afterward if they attended.

Numbers Fifty-two and Twenty-six both attended that Friday's auction. Again they spent over \$10,000 apiece. Hadeker sat at his desk examining Knapp's record of the auction, noting that bidder Number Nineteen had spent over \$30,000.

"I had Twenty-six and Fifty-two followed after the auction, sir," Knapp said as he lowered himself into the chair in front of Hadeker's desk. "And I followed Number Nineteen myself. I recognized him—a hot-car dealer from about five years ago named Vernon Decker. He spent last night in an apartment at 352 DeLancy that has the name Lucy Wescox on the mailbox."

Hadeker nodded. The sharp-faced man's name, Louis Meredith, meant nothing to him. But Number Fifty-two, Sam Philton, Hadeker was sure he'd heard of before. It would be easy enough to check on everyone, including Lucy Wescox. "Run the names through Records," he said. "Maybe we can make some connections."

"I already did, Lieutenant." With a lopsided smile, Knapp reached into an inside pocket of his baggy jacket and withdrew some papers.

Hadeker spread the Records forms on his desk and decided that if it

could be arranged he was going to Colonel Speedwing's next auction.

Many of the same faces were at the auction, though Vernon Decker, last week's high bidder, wasn't present. He had been picked up that afternoon, along with the Wescox girl, along with more than enough incriminating evidence. That and two out-of-state warrants had made it easy to convince Vernon Decker to talk.

Colonel Speedwing was at his lectern, and the same two ring-men, Baldy and Wiry, were ready to start work. As most of the bidders filed between the rows of metal chairs to sit down, Hadeker took a standing position along a wall to the left of the colonel, near a door. He had registered and been assigned Number Twenty-nine.

"Hey now, whadda weee got here, boys?"

Hadeker waited patiently as the auction progressed, admiring the colonel's wheedling artistry.

An hour later the bald man held up a colorful, exquisitely graceful vase.

"Saaay now," the colonel chanted, "that's a genuine Meissen vase! Should bring five thousand dollars. Do I have five? Four-and-a-half? Four? Three? . . ."

"Hyup!" The wiry man flung a hand toward the bidder, as if hurling a stone, while his bald counterpart's eyes scanned the crowd with hawk-like intensity.

Hadeker saw that Louis Meredith, the sharp-faced man, had bid on the vase.

"Now give me four! Three-and-a-half ! . . ."

"Hyup!" Sam Philton, seated near the opposite wall, had entered the bidding.

"Four now! I want four, four, foour! . . ."

"Hyup!" A well-dressed woman in the front row had bid, raising her hand at the same time as a man two rows behind her.

"Got it twice!" the bald man shouted.

"Four-two-fiftee then!" the colonel coaxed. The woman nodded and he pointed his gavel handle at her while staring at the man. "Now four-and-a-half!" The man shook his head no. "Give me four-and-a-haaalf! . . ."

Hadeker raised his hand.

"Hyup!" The bald ring man appeared slightly surprised. So did the colonel, whose forehead was glinting with perspiration.

"Now five! Four-seven-fifty nooooww!" he chanted, aiming his gavel handle at Hadeker like a gun barrel and staring at the woman, who shook her head no.

"Hyup!" Meredith had raised his hand.

"Now five, five, five! . . ."

Hadeker nodded at the same time as Philton.

"Five-two-fifty now! Five-two-fiftee! . . ."

Hadeker's and Meredith's nods were simultaneous.

"Hyup! Hyup!"

"Five-and-a-haaalf! . . ."

Hadeker nodded.

Philton shook his head firmly and began moving toward the door where Knapp stood.

"I want five-seven-fifty!" the colonel shouted, eyes darting in puzzlement.

Meredith glanced around and nodded.

"Hyup!"

"Now six! . . ."

Hadeker quickly nodded.

"Hyup!"

"Now six-two-fiftee! . . ." Meredith was holding his chin in thought. "Six-two-fiftee nooooww!" Meredith shook his head no, glaring at the colonel. "Six-two-fiftee!" The colonel paused, squeezing the edges of his lectern as if he'd at last run out of breath. "Sold!" He pointed the gavel handle at Hadeker. "For six thousand dollars to Number . . . ?" Hadeker held up his card. "Number Twenty-nine!"

Hadeker's knees were almost weak enough to buckle. For an instant the rest of it wasn't real; he had just spent ten times his savings account on a small vase. He saw the wiry ring man leave the area beneath the bright lights and walk back toward the registration table, probably to check the identity of wild-bidding Number Twenty-nine. No doubt the actual value of the vase was far less than Hadeker's final bid.

Meredith stood and left by a side door Hadeker knew was being watched. Knapp already had quietly removed Philton. When the auction was over, Hadeker would personally see Colonel Speedwing. . .

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Speedwing appeared a much smaller man in his office.

"You pay at the next office for the vase," he said, recognizing Hadeker immediately. He sat down wearily at a cluttered rolltop desk.

"The thing is," Hadeker said, "it wasn't the vase I bought." He showed the auctioneer his shield. "We know that when you signal certain bidders by introducing an item up for bid with the words 'say now,' what's really up for bid is a predetermined amount of processed heroin. You thought you had a safe method of getting top prices from some of the area's biggest drug dealers. The worth of the drugs was always slightly higher than the worth of the objects up for bid so you could be guaranteed that only the drug dealers would be in on the final bidding. The objects everyone else thought they were bidding on you kept and sold elsewhere out of state."

Colonel Speedwing became older and smaller beneath Hadeker's gaze.

"I have a search warrant," Hadeker said, "but we both know it will benefit you in court if you cooperate."

The colonel nodded forlornly, swiveled in his chair to open an ancient safe, and handed Hadeker several sealed plastic packets. Tearing open one of the packets, Hadeker touched a fingertip to the contents, and tasted.

"Your real name," Hadeker told the colonel, "is Jason Speedwing Gadby, and you're known on the West Coast as a dealer in drugs and firearms. You've just sold a police officer six thousand dollars' worth of heroin, Jason, and you've already been convicted twice in California. This time it will be a long stretch for you."

The colonel appeared to think about that, about how long that stretch was likely to be, and about how old he was. He stood slowly, without any attempt to muster dignity, and said in a low half whisper that Hadeker barely heard, "Going . . . going . . . gone."





*Hans Stiller wasn't the type to be traveling aboard a slow uncomfortable ship . . .*

# THE MEDDLER

by  
KATHRYN  
GOTTLIEB



Stiller and the girl boarded the *Khandios* at Rijeka on the Adriatic, where the Yugoslav freighter was taking on a load of grass rugs and wicker gazebos. The salt air smelled like a hayfield. The ship was sailing that day for Brooklyn, New York. Stiller had in the past year found himself in Singapore, Buenos Aires, and other places distant from his native Geneva. However, this was the first time he had been on board a ship since his fourteenth year. He looked happy, and a little as-

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tonished at finding himself there. The girl, Jennie Dickinson, had been blundering her way around Europe for a year and a half. Stiller was twice her age and a bit more. They had not met before boarding ship. They were the only passengers.

The captain, a cheerful man who spoke English volubly and with an impenetrable accent, invited them to sit at his table. He had hoped for lively conversation, but after a day's effort he gave up. Stiller had slipped into a pensive mood and seemed to come back from a mile deep in himself when he responded to the captain's remarks, with an effort so palpable as to verge on rudeness. The girl, at least, smiled at him and chatted willingly enough, but she seemed unable to grasp the captain's English and their conversation made no sense.

Let it go, the captain thought, there would be other voyages. By the time the ship had swung westward into the Mediterranean he himself had gone silent, looking absorbedly at his two passengers from time to time and making up stories about them in his head.

The Swiss he found a good-looking fellow, tall, well built, fine featured, with a good tan setting off his clear light-blue eyes. The captain noticed a sprinkling of grey in the smooth fair hair. An urbane fellow—a puzzle, not at all the type to be traveling aboard a slow and not very comfortable cargo ship in this day and age. Obviously a man who had seen something of the world.

The girl was, well, the usual thing. The *Khandios* had carried her type many times before; a student burdened (and burdensome) with too much money or too much freedom. They were unhappy, all of them, and all in trouble of some kind. He'd bet this one was no different. But it pleased him to look at her. Her features, like the man's, were fine, beautiful almost; her hair was a pleasing light brown, the color of American soda pop, and her large clear caramel-colored eyes were a match for her hair. But she was careless about herself, dirty really. If she were his daughter he wouldn't have put up with it, the hair streaming down all anyhow and in need of a wash. Didn't women care what they looked like any more?

One night—they were steaming past the toe of Italy, approximately at that point—the captain was called away from the table mid-meal, leaving them alone together.

The girl put down her fork and looked at Stiller. "You are one disagreeable man," she said.

Stiller looked shocked. "I am only quiet," he said. "There is nothing personal in it. I'm sorry that I distress you."

"I'm not distressed. Don't flatter yourself."

Stiller smiled. "Let me try to explain to you. I am here on this boat to be away from the world for a little time. I am making a retreat, as one would say in religion. I am making believe to myself that I am all alone in the world, that the world does not exist. To tell you the truth, that is very hard to do when *you* are so—so determined. So noisy, in fact."

"Oh, 'human' is what you're trying to say." She picked up her fork and began to eat again. Her appetite was a curse. Sometimes she thought that she would never outgrow it; if she weren't tall she'd be fat. Gross! "I'm not noisy. I'm too *quiet*. You have no right to go off into yourself like that when the captain and I are trying to be friendly. You *strand* people." There were tears in her eyes. "Don't you think you have some kind of responsibility to respond? I'm not asking you to communicate, for God's sake, but can't you even talk about the weather?"

Stiller blanched. "I'm sorry I upset you."

"I told you I'm not upset!"

"No, really, I am contrite. I have been locked into myself, and that's wrong. I see that. I'll try to do better, I promise. I shall respond, and perhaps I shall communicate."

Time passed and he did neither. Two mornings later she made her way to the afterdeck where he was leaning against the rail, staring northward over the sea in the direction of the Colosseum, the Simplon Tunnel, and other invisible wonders of the Western world. "You," she said.

He turned. He was very tall so that she took a step backward in order to look into his eyes. "I'm going to tell you something." And for ten minutes she did, describing his attitude, character, demeanor, disposition, expression, and manner very unkindly and in order.

He listened politely, then gestured toward the sloping ocean. "I'm like the element that surrounds us," he said soberly. "Disagreeable, cold, and profound."

She said something in reply.

"I wish you wouldn't use such language."

"Don't criticize me. I know why you won't talk. It's because you've got a lot to cover up. You don't belong on a tub like this. You're a jet person. Are you a fugitive from the law?"

He looked startled. "I shall not discuss my affairs with you. I wish to create an effect of time and of space in my life. There is a part of it I leave behind and a part that I go forward to, and that is all that I shall tell you. I have come here to think. I didn't know I would be attacked by a thousand fleas."

"You mean me."

"Yes."

"I'll go over the side."

He looked suddenly serious. "Don't say that, please."

"I might just as well do it. You make me feel as though I don't exist—though, as you say, I suppose there's nothing personal in it. You don't like women."

"But I do."

"You sit at that table day after day and you don't even see me."

He shrugged. "I don't consider you a woman," he said.

"Oh I am one, believe me!" The color rushed into her face. "Plenty of other people know it. It's you. You probably don't even understand your own nature. You wouldn't even want to make love to me, would you?"

He looked at her carefully, up and down, smiling a little. Her hair flying in the wind was not clean; her clear skin matched the color of her hair—she was all of a piece, all harmony. And a woman. But—

"No," he said truthfully, "I don't want to make love to you. It would be more useful to give you a bath."

"Why don't you then? Why don't you do that?" Tears were standing in her eyes.

She turned out to be such a pretty girl once he had the grit washed off that he made love to her after all.

Mealtimes were as quiet as before; the smiling captain, the bad food—nothing had changed but the quality of the silence. When they were alone, elbow to elbow at the rail staring out over the sea, or lying in his bed, she talked insistently and artlessly of her past history and present state and of the plenty of other people who knew she was a woman. She was the child of rich parents who had divorced, married

others, had new families, were remote, and gave her enough money to run around Europe. She had slept with a Frenchman in Rome, an Italian in Belgrade—always one country behind, she said. And then, she told him, one day in Dubrovnik she had cried and cried and thought maybe she was going to do something stupid like jumping off the city wall because she had been everywhere and done everything and nothing was any good.

The Swiss was shocked at that. "That's what I mean when I say you are not a woman," he said. "Not yet. You can't make such judgments yet. You have not really been so very many places—and anyway places are not important. You have not done many things; only the same thing over." He said it in a kindly way, to make her cheerful and hopeful.

She began to grow attached to him although he told her nothing of himself. One evening as they sat down to dinner, the captain, sensing a change in mood, plunged into conversation with Stiller in his extraordinary English. The girl excused herself abruptly, saying that she had forgotten something, and went to Stiller's cabin, trembling as she stole through the deserted passageways, and closing the door without sound behind her.

The cabin was a big space with old-fashioned furnishings, creaking and shifting. She searched the room frantically and ineptly, jerking open one drawer after another, clawing through layers of clothing with shaking hands, and dipping her fingers into the pockets of the suits that hung, primitively, behind a curtain. She learned nothing. When she got back to the table, she was breathing quickly and her face was scarlet with guilt. He looked at her and his blondish eyebrows lifted a little. "Nothing," he said. "I could have told you that."

"I have such a headache," she said. "I had to take aspirin. My face feels hot." She closed her eyes and put her hand across them. Surprisingly, under the captain's gaze, he reached over to her and took her hand in his and lowered it gently to the table. "It's all right," he said.

When the dinner was over she went to her cabin and he followed her. They sat side by side on the hard mattress. "I'm sorry," she said, staring in front of her. "I had no business prying. People are entitled to their own lives. But I don't know anything about you. You won't tell

me anything. I want to know about you, that's all."

He smiled a little. "That shows proper feeling on your part."

"Don't make fun of me! It's all a big joke to you. It's a joke all right, but not the way you think! I wish you could see yourself! The lines in your face—I don't know why someone *unblemished* like me should want anyone like you!" Her round eyes were intent.

She traced a line down his cheek with her finger. "Life has been making tracks all over your face. And that's what *I* want. I want to *know*!"

"You will know a great deal someday. *Now*, be young. For me, your youth is your great quality."

She stroked his face. Her hand was rough as a peasant woman's and the gesture was rough to match it. "Maybe all I've got is my youth," she said, "but all you've got is your middle age. Just give me time and I'll know everything, just the way you do. Why won't you tell me everything *now*?"

He took hold of her hand and kissed the palm. He was laughing.

But during the night he began to consider certain possibilities. At breakfast the next day she said to him in front of the captain, whose eyes followed the conversation, left, right, left, right, "You look worried."

"I'm beginning to wonder."

"About what?"

"We'll talk sometime."

The captain swallowed his coffee and excused himself from the table.

"Well, what?" she said.

"Why are you travelling on this ship? Who told you to search through my things?"

"I'm here because I'm going home. To die, probably." She stared. "Nobody told me to do anything."

"I don't believe you."

"Believe me. Nobody told me. But *I* don't know about *you*. I know your name because you told me—Hans Otto Stiller. But how do I know it's true? Maybe you're Joe Schmidt or Leonardo da Vinci. What do you do for a living?"

"Who told you to make love to me?"

"Nobody! I told you! You think I've got a Svengali or something? The C.I.A.? You think I'm being *operated*? It was my own idea!"

"God knows it wasn't mine. So . . . can I believe it was yours?"

"Believe it, it's true. I'm too young to lie. Old people lie because they can't be bothered to establish a *relationship* with people any more."

"All right." He shook his head. "I believe you. All the same, it's very inconvenient."

The night before they docked in Brooklyn he told her that she was a lovely woman, indeed a woman, and that he would always remember her.

"You don't mean it's over!" she said.

"Oh, Jennie," he said. "Sweet child. It was only for the voyage. You know that. You are a traveler too."

But she cried bitterly and begged him to take care of her.

He said that he couldn't.

She put her hands over her ears. Her eyes were frantic. "I was lost," she said. "You found me. I can't be lost again. I can't!"

He pulled her hands down from her ears. "Listen to me. I am as real as you are and you must listen to me. Sit down." They were in his cabin. He still had hold of her hands and he pulled her down to sit beside him on the ordinary brass-trimmed bed.

"I want to go with you," she said. "Take me with you."

"I want to explain myself to you," he said. "My position in life."

"No."

"Yes. You are perceptive. You understood that it would be more ordinary for me to fly, more the usual thing. And I *was* going to fly to New York. I am in business, in a way of making money that I have wanted for a long time to quit. But that has been hard to do because there is money in it and money is attractive. But what is attractive enslaves, and I find myself trapped in what is repugnant to me, buying and selling what I have no right to be dealing in."

"Are you a spy?"

"Of a kind."

"Wow. Why would you ever want to stop?"

"I know this must sound very pretentious to you, but I assure you I feel it very strongly. Now—right now—is the time for me to make a break in my life. I have a mother who is getting to be a very old lady. I have settled money on her. I have a son who must someday be very

expensively educated. I have set aside money for that purpose. I—"

"You're married?"

"No longer. My son's mother is someone else's wife now."

"Oh."

"So you see, now is the time for me to free myself from a way of life I chose a long time ago that no longer suits me. I have no money, no responsibilities." He reached out and tapped her cheek with a finger. "Here, don't look like that. You look like a pouting child. It's ugly. I will finish, and you will please be civilized. When I was going to fly to New York, it was to see someone with whom I was going to do business in the old way that I have now stopped. He had something to sell that he didn't want to sell, but I wished to buy it and he would be obliged to sell it to me."

"Why?"

"Because he had sold other things to me before."

"What is it, some kind of blackmail?"

"Let me finish. Each day that has gone by that he has not heard from me I know he has rejoiced. He begins to think he is free. So let him be free of me, and I shall be free of him, and of all that business. In my soul, believe me, I am weary of it. Dear girl, you want me to take on the responsibility of you. If I do that, then I must take up the old life again. I must see *him* again. Then he is not free, I am not free. Right now there is no money in anything else for me. Eventually, yes, of course—I am an able man. But first I must find my footing in this new world. Do you see? Do you understand what you're asking of me?"

She had been very pale, and now the color was back in her cheeks. "I think that's a lot of nonsense," she said. "You don't want to start over again and you know it. You *can't*. You're *forty*." Suddenly she dropped to her knees, took his two hands together in hers, and raised her eyes to his. "Whatever you did before couldn't have been so terrible or you wouldn't have done it. You *wouldn't*. I believe in you. It's all right. You can do it again if you have to—once more. And then we'll think of something. It's not as though anybody died of what you did, is it?"

"No. Not yet."

"Well then!"

"No."



But in the morning they docked and he stood beside her at the rail, watching her watch the seamen on the pier as the ship was made fast. She looked very young in her fashionably shabby clothes and the city waiting for her looked like a trap with dirty spiked teeth. "All right," he said. "Stay with me."

"I love you," she said, not raising her eyes from the men on the dock. "I'll look after you." When she turned to him she was crying. She looked beautiful, fragile, rosy.

It was then nine o'clock in the morning. She walked with him to a telephone booth on the pier, where he called to make an appointment with a man named Alden Lucas for one o'clock that day. She heard the name, then moved away politely. She had no wish to interfere in his business and had little interest in it. Then they drove a rented car southwestward into New Jersey until they were perhaps fifty miles from the city; past sprawling industrial plants, orchards in full bloom, and factories and meadows heaped with industrial debris. Past a small town whose name she didn't notice, Stiller pulled off the highway and into the parking lot of a large motel. There he booked a room. The room smelled of air-conditioning and its windows overlooked ruined fields.

"You're not coming back to me, are you?" she said to him.

"Of course I'll come back. I am only here because of you."

"I can't stay here wondering. Take me with you."

In the end he agreed. "Drive the car," he told her. "You can drop me off and then you can run around all day and meet me back here at dinnertime. My friend will see to it that I get back."

Shortly past noon they left the motel. Hans drove, taking a southwesterly direction for some miles on the highway, and then making two successive right turns onto secondary roads that ran through an industrial area, then plowed fields, then more small, new, immaculate factory buildings, and orchards. Abandoned fields. She had lost all sense of direction.

Then Stiller pulled to the side of the road and stopped. They were in the midst of an orchard that stretched along both sides of the road. The trees looked neglected and burdened with dead branches. A large sign offered forty acres for sale for industrial use. "What is it?" she asked him, staring around with curiosity. "Peaches? Pears?"

"Apples," said Hans. "Rome Beauties, I'm told. Who knows if it will

bear another crop."

"You've been here before, haven't you?"

"Yes." His voice was flat. "Release me. You be the clever one, the old one. There's still time. Release me."

She stared at his eyes, a pretty child, all consuming, and said nothing.

"All right," he said at last. He opened the car door and got out.

"How do I know you're coming back?"

"You still doubt me?"

"I'm afraid."

"Here." He emptied his pockets, slapping everything down on the seat beside her. "Wallet. Passport. Everything. Now do you believe me?"

"You didn't have to do that."

He walked around to the driver's side and stood staring for a moment at her hands on the wheel. They were small, rough, the nails bitten.

"What is it?"

"Nothing." He leaned into the window, kissed her lightly, and moved off, away from the road and into the trees.

She returned immediately to the motel room and began to wait for him. Long past dusk she continued to sit almost motionless in the single uncomfortable chair the room provided, staring at the carpet until it grew too dark to see its pattern, lifting her head from time to time at the sound of footsteps in the corridor. When he had not returned by eight o'clock she got into the tub and scrubbed herself clean. She thought of Hans describing the color of her hair—like sand at the water's edge, he had said. Later she spent some hours sitting on the bed beside the neat pile she had made of his passport, his wallet, and papers. When it was three in the morning and he had still not returned she got down on her knees and prayed earnestly that he be permitted to come back safely to her and that if he did, and chose to, she would do anything, anything that was required, keep any bargain. She would leave him alone, if God wanted her to leave him alone; she would go away somewhere. Then she picked up the car keys and went out.

Alden Lucas was a handsome man. He was tall and his dark thick hair, straight as an Indian's, grew in an attractive line above a broad and

well-shaped forehead. He had large expressive eyes that gave him a look of steady purpose and responsiveness. He had been born with a distinguished profile and expectations of a substantial inheritance. He was now forty and retained both. He had attended St. Paul's and graduated from Princeton with a degree in engineering. His choice of a career seemed to his family demanding and peculiar, not to say whimsical or freakish. He had himself expected to go into the sales end of the profession but nothing had been offered. He found himself working instead on the design of certain electronic equipment for a small corporation that was not, in his view, very well run. He longed to run the place himself. After some years he went to work for a firm called Medex-L, a prosperous corporation owning factories in Europe as well as in the United States. There he worked on the design of sophisticated electronic devices for the medical profession. Still, he was unhappy. He wanted to head his own firm and do things his own way, win or lose.

He approached his mother—she had by then been widowed ten years—and finally, after he had been three years with Medex-L, she sold her AT&T shares and gave him the proceeds, less (she explained) the appalling capital gains. She was crying when she handed the money over to him, out of nervousness and fear, and because she loved him and didn't know if she was doing him a kindness or an injury. "This is all," she told him, meaning all that there was for him. For her there remained the substantial holdings that Alden's grandfather had made over to her at the time of her marriage.

Alden called his new firm The Lucas Company and it prospered in a small way. He married a childhood acquaintance and then, five years later when things began to go badly with The Lucas Company, appeared to forget her. She divorced him. He was startled at the breach but on the whole found life simpler because he was then able to eat a sandwich at his desk and get back to work. The outside world dropped away and he let it go.

Then the inside world of The Lucas Company began to drop away. In his daily struggles to keep the business afloat he blundered, made bad decisions, grew confused. He slept badly, dreaming on more than one occasion that the new building he was so proud of had collapsed and fallen in on him in a cascade of bricks and mortar. On several occasions he borrowed money to cover the payroll from his production

manager, a thrifty young immigrant from the Caribbean. He failed to cover a note for a shipment of plastic casings. One black Wednesday at nine in the morning his chief supplier called to demand cash on delivery. He wrote a check with no money in the bank—he was already late and accruing penalties on an Air Force contract—what else was he to do? And then at ten o'clock his employees, whom he had been driving hard and unkindly, walked off the job. At noon two units he had delivered under an earlier contract were returned, having been found not to be within contract tolerances. They stood in their crates where the trucker had dumped them. Lucas walked into the empty plant and stared at them. Someone had left a window open and in the orchard beyond the mourning doves were making their usual comment on the human predicament.

Two weeks earlier the plant had been broken into and rolls of copper wire stolen. Lucas had brought in his army pistol and locked it away in a drawer of his desk. Let them try it again when he was there. He thought now of the gun and imagined the ring of cool metal pressed against his forehead, a small circle of comfort and oblivion. No. He was tougher than that. He could understand how some poor bastards were driven to it. But it was not for him—the aftermath of strangers pawing through his papers, making decisions about The Lucas Company. The doves were still crying in the orchard. He shouted an obscenity at them.

He locked the place and walked out into the parking lot, empty now except for his own car. He had long ago come to the end of his credit line but now he went once again to talk to Sam Crosswell at the County National Bank. Sam had known his father. Lucas had a deep and compelling voice. The conversation was pleasant. Crosswell experienced nostalgia and told anecdotes. Alden came away empty-handed. It was late winter but the day was warm for the season and clear. He sat in his car for some time staring at the bank building, a new structure sheathed in yellowish tile. Commercially orphaned, he remembered his living parent.

That afternoon he pleaded with his mother to sell some of her holdings. Not a lot, he said, he didn't need very much. He suggested the General Electric shares, she would get a good price for them now. She was dumfounded that he should be sitting there on her velvet sofa in the middle of the day, in the middle of the week, asking for more

money.

"I can't," she said. "I can't." Her hair was just beginning to show grey. It was smartly done and she was handsomely dressed but she was beginning to look old.

"Please," he begged her. But she simply sat there trembling.

"Your grandfather said never to sell! And to put all that into something that's losing money! How can you ask me? You told me yourself it's losing money."

"But I'm not some stranger," he said. "This is my business we're talking about, Mother. It's *mine*!" She shook her head. "Oh, Christ," he said, and buried his head in his hands. But she wouldn't sell.

It was at this juncture that Hans Stiller first approached him.

Stiller made it his business to follow up certain people, businesses, kinds of circumstances. He had had a European customer for a World-Medex-L process for some time. It was one Alden Lucas had worked on. World-M-L owned the patent. Stiller offered him an immense number of Swiss francs for information. Translated into American dollars the amount was still enormous. Alden's memory was excellent. Information and money changed hands.

The Lucas Company pulled out of its crisis. A few grey hairs appeared, attractively, about Alden Lucas's brow. He did business with Hans Stiller again. This time, Stiller provided the information. As a result, Lucas emerged low bidder on a contract on which he cleared a reasonable profit.

The two men made use of each other profitably, sporadically, over a period of several years. The Lucas Company expanded. Capital was available when needed—Stiller saw to it. As the company grew and prospered, the need for funds increased. Lucas was competing in the field with giant corporations. There was nothing he would not have done for cash or contracts, and it was all for the company—he wanted nothing for himself. He wore good suits until they were shabby and forgot to change the tires on his car when they were bald.

From time to time he took an interest in one woman or another and made love to them with an unsettling mixture of concentration and absent-mindedness so that none of the affairs went on for very long. After a while he more or less settled down with Betty Dominick, who headed his purchasing department. She was a tall, overweight, fair-haired girl with slightly protruding blue eyes and she was beautiful and

conscience-stricken in an old-fashioned way he found comforting. Lucas dived into the offered relationship as into some grand cooling stream. From time to time she cooked dinner for him and he stayed the night with her. She loved him, but she was intelligent and she saw the sulky turn of his mouth, the smile that failed to change the habitual coldness of his expression. She expected nothing from him. She was twenty-eight when their relationship began.

It ended on the day Hans Stiller called on Lucas for the last time.

Two months previously Mrs. Lucas had slipped and fallen on a Paris sidewalk. A day later she was dead. Alden was her sole heir and he obtained immediate funds against the General Electric stock. He was almost insane with relief. Earlier, in adversity, he had forgotten his wife. Now, in prosperity, he ceased to need Betty. She simply slipped his mind. On the other hand, he was obsessed with Hans Stiller, with his continuing presence in the world. The man's existence was a threat. In the moment of learning of his mother's death Lucas had repudiated all the double-dealing and chicanery he had ever engaged in. It was like a madness that had gone, leaving his true character exposed once more to sunlight—honorable, upright, and *moneyed*.

Lucas informed Stiller at once that there would be an end to the transactions between them and Stiller agreed. But Lucas continued to brood. He had worried for so long that it was a habit. The thought of Stiller was repugnant and he could not put him out of his mind.

And now, on this day that should have been fine, with the sunlight flooding his desk, Stiller called, in violation of his promise. They must meet at once, he said; it was imperative. His voice seemed strained. Lucas hesitated, then agreed. Unseen, the man would fill the world; meet with him and he would shrink to size. It is always better to meet the enemy. It was ridiculous that Stiller should think that a man in Lucas's position should now become involved in information-peddling and bid-rigging. Could Stiller force his hand? Lucas didn't have to be paranoid to see blackmail in it. Men like Stiller were parasites.

As he put down the telephone, Betty Dominick walked in and put down a small stack of papers on the desk in front of him. He stared at her with the eyes of a blind man. "Aren't you going to look at the figures?" she asked him. "You've been waiting for them."

"Sit down, Betty." His voice had the same curiously unfocused quality she had seen in his eyes. She sank into a chair and looked at him

across the desk. She had come in to tell him that she was leaving him.

"It rests me to look at you," he said. He had said it many times.

"No. No more of that. *Look* at me, will you?"

"I am looking at you."

She shook her head. "Not really," she sighed. "You look like a man who drinks before breakfast. You've got everything you want now, and that's the way you look. As for me, you don't need me and I'm going." The light slanting down out of the tall windows was lighting him in a dramatic way; it reminded her of the dark etchings with blasts of light in them that her mother had hung in the house. "You look like a saint," she said. "I'm leaving you."

She stood.

"What will you do?"

"Marry a stranger. Have ten children. I'm thirty. If I can't have love I'll have children. I'll love *them*."

She heard the small obligatory scrape of his chair as he pushed it away from his desk. "Don't get up," she said.

When it was time to leave for the meeting with Hans in the orchard he got up from his chair, unlocked a drawer, and from the back of it took the old army pistol. He put on his topcoat and slipped the gun into his pocket. If Stiller threatened him, then he would threaten Stiller and that would be an end to the matter. Stiller was a menace but not a fool.

Stiller was waiting for him. Lucas made one last effort. "Hans," he said, "listen to me." His tone was patient. "You and I have always worked well together. We have understood one another, or at least we have understood what was needed from each other. I think you understand my position. You can't ask me to jeopardize everything now. There's a tremendous risk in what we're doing. There always has been."

"All I want is the information for the people in Milan. There is no risk for you in this. Or, I'll be fair—it almost doesn't exist. If you don't need the money, I do. It's the last time."

"I have no reason to believe that."

"Do you think you're the only one who is tired of thieving and double-dealing? I see you don't like my choice of words, but I am a realist. And—listen to me, please—you are my friend, in a way you are my

friend, and you must believe me. I plan to leave this life behind me forever. You need never give a thought to me again.

"I crossed the Atlantic on such an old tub—I wish you could see it. I thought it was appropriate to start a new life with an uncharacteristic act. I thought of air and salt water and time and strangeness and, at the end of it, what? Myself rediscovered? Childish! But that was what was in my mind. And then something happened. I can't explain it. I must have money. It is the last time in this world I'll ask you to do this. But I must have money."

For a moment Lucas had no reply. Then Hans said, "I must look after this girl."

"That's disgusting," said Lucas.

As he spoke he had an odd vision, as though he had fallen asleep for an instant. He saw his mother making over the G.E. shares to Hans Stiller, parasite. He shook his head to clear it. "I won't be blackmailed," he said. The sun was in his eyes. He moved a little to one side. The old apple trees were beginning to leaf out and a lingering sweet scent of earth, of moving sap, of fallen petals, hung in the air. Tears stung his eyes. The world was such a beautiful place if only one were free to enjoy it. But he would never be free. How could he live out the rest of his life when at any time Stiller could put an end to everything?

"You're scum," he said. "Get out of here."

Stiller watched him with a sad and penetrating stare. "I'm sad," he said. "It is the truth. My heart is like lead. I'm sorry that that is the way you feel. But I must remind you that you are in no position to refuse me. Or, for that matter, to describe me in such terms."

Lucas brought the gun out of his pocket and aimed it at Hans, who put up a hand instinctively to fend him off. There was a smile of disbelief on his face. Lucas pulled the trigger.

He was back at his desk before two. The contract work sheets were still on his desk. It seemed impossible that those papers should be there, that things had not changed. He picked up the top sheet and looked at it. He was unable to understand it. The words and figures didn't seem to reach his mind. He was frightened and his heart started to race. I'm going to die, he thought. After a while he was calm. He studied the figures that Betty had gotten ready for him and initialed the sheets with a steady hand. . .



It took Jennie two weeks to track him down. On that first night she had driven back to the orchard. The ground was muddy under her feet and the blackness absolute. She walked to where the trees began and called out timidly—"Hans!" A self-contained and inimical feeling emanated from the orchard. It began to rain quite heavily and she went back to the car. She sat there for some time. Before driving away she looked at her hands on the wheel and said aloud, "I am alone in the world."

Two days later, the foreman, Fernandez, loyal lender of payroll money to The Lucas Compañy in the difficult days of the past, found the body. He and the manager of the Texaco station had been talking about the gulls wheeling over the orchard—like over a garbage dump, they said. Fernandez investigated. It had rained heavily the day before and the man's body, when he came to it, was sodden. There was no identification.

Jennie, lying on her bed in the motel room, heard the broadcast description. She switched off the radio and turned on her side and slept. The whole world was like the orchard, closed against her. When she woke she knelt and prayed for the repose of Stiller's soul with a phrase she had read somewhere; he might have been a Catholic, she didn't know. There was a great deal now that she would never know about him and she wondered why she hadn't spent their whole time together asking questions.

For some days she was ill with loss and did nothing. Then she began to try to remember the name of the man Hans had gone to meet. It was gone from her mind. She remembered everything else. She had stared at a stamped tin ceiling while Hans had telephoned and she remembered the pattern of it, squares with a four-petaled flower and a little knob in the center of each. She remembered his coming away from the telephone and every moment of that last day with him, the sound of his voice. But the name was gone. She drove several times to the orchard, turned, and came back. It told her nothing. She did nothing else. She was in the grip of lassitude.

She drove again to the orchard. In the night it had been windy and the last of the blossoms had blown from the trees. The temperature had dropped and the sky was grey. She drove on past the last of the trees, took a side turning, and then another, left and left again. She drove past a Texaco station, and then a low factory building that looked

new. Handsome bronze-toned metal letters spelled out the name across the facade. *The Lucas Company*. She heard Hans's voice in the telephone booth asking for Alden Lucas. It was painful to hear. She drove back to the motel.

For several days, she did nothing more. It was enough, just then, to know the man's name.

In the end she went to see him. She was shown into his office by a woman who politely went away, shutting the door behind her. Alden Lucas motioned her into a chair opposite his desk. She sat and he stared at her. She had gotten thin since Hans had vanished and her round cheekbones stood out in her narrow face. She seemed to Lucas to be all one color, or tones of a single color, all harmony. There were dark patches under her eyes. She looked like a tired child. His heart began to beat unpleasantly.

His voice was tired but still had the quality that Betty Dominick had thought of as encircling. "I'm told you want to see me?" He smiled a little, to create an ordinary occasion with no danger in it. "There's something you want me to do for you?"

"You know," said Jennie, "I want you to take care of me."

His mind refused it, but his fingertips understood. There was a sensation in them of sudden bloodlessness. He picked up the paper knife and tapped it idly on the desk, remembering how he had stood in the empty factory and listened to the doves crying in the orchard. "You'll have to explain yourself," he said.

"But you know. It's so hard for me to talk about it. At first I was going to ask you for money but I don't want money. What would I do with money? I've travelled. I was standing on the wall at Dubrovnik. I was going to throw myself off but I couldn't make up my mind—one side or the other, old town or new town. I even thought of a job, but I can't do anything really. You're a decisive person. *Don't laugh at me!*"

"I'm sorry. You're saying some very odd things. Why should I do anything for you?"

"You don't know?"

"No."

"Don't lie. Actually you know perfectly well. Because of him." Her voice wavered. "Hans."

He leaned back in his chair and rapped the paper knife gently on his knuckles. "Hans?"

"Hans Stiller. You should remember him. You killed him. You're the one he went to meet in the orchard. He *said* you weren't going to like it." Her composure broke and she began to sob.

"So that was the reason."

She stopped crying and looked at him sharply. "Reason for what?"

"For his coming to me again." He shrugged. "The reason for your being here. But I'm afraid you've come to the wrong place."

"Oh, no," she said. "Don't lie." Again her eyes filled with tears. "Everybody your age lies and lies! You never tell the truth. You know you killed him. He's dead because of you."

"Maybe not because of *me*."

She looked at him strangely, then smiled. "We've entered a different world together, you and I," she said. "Hans was going to take care of me. Now I have no one. Only you."

He pushed back his chair and walked around his desk to her. She stood, facing him. "You think I killed Stiller and still you're asking me to take care of you? Look at me. Aren't you afraid of me?"

Her clear brown eyes looked into his. "I'm not afraid. I was afraid when I was going to jump off that wall. And then when I met Hans I wasn't afraid any more. Don't you see?—I don't know how to live. I don't know how people figure out what they want to do and then go ahead and do it. I went into this shopping center yesterday. You see these women. They have short hair and car coats and little boys and they live in *houses*. I don't know how to get into it. I don't know how they know what they want to do and then do it.

"Hans was going to take care of me. Now you will have to."

He shook his head. "You don't know what you're saying. You really believe I killed Hans. And still you put yourself in my hands."

"Yes!" She reached up and held his face in her two hands. "Yes! You're fundamentally very good. I can see it."

He grasped her hands and took them away from his face. She stepped back a little from him. "You *will* take care of me?"

"Yes."

She smiled. "I'll take care of you too." With her reddish peasant hand she reached up and stroked his face. Lightly she drew her fingertips down his cheek and across his eyelids. "Life has been tramping all over your face. I'll take care of you," she said. "I'll take care of you."

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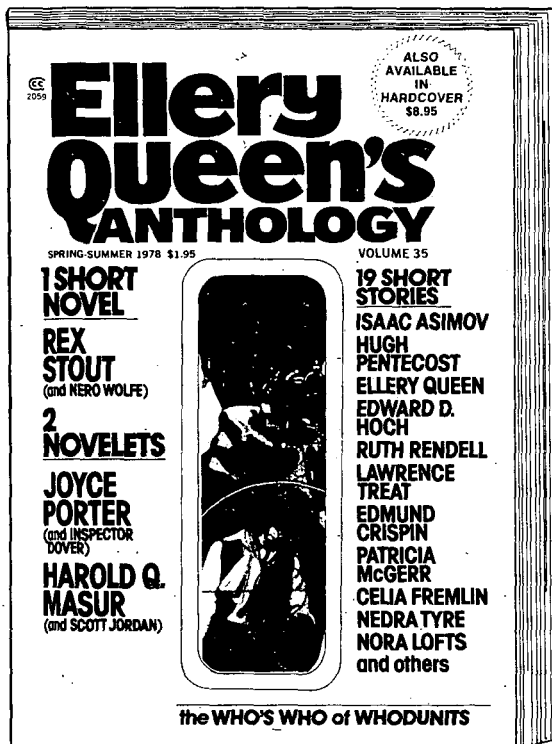
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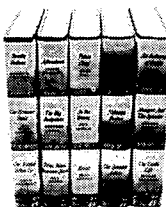
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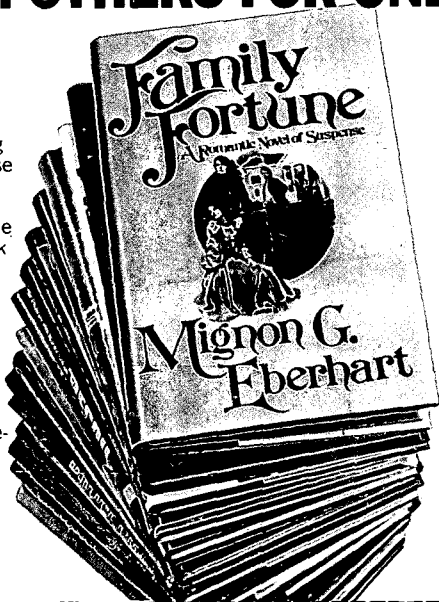
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